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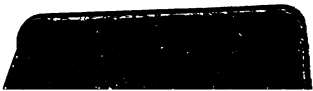
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# Our Lady of Laughter



A. Roman  
of Court & State

A. D. Hall

Robert J. Downing

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OUR LADY OF LAUGHTER.

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# OUR LADY OF LAUGHTER.

A ROMANCE OF COURT AND STAGE.

BY

A. D. HALL

AND

ROBERT L. DOWNING.

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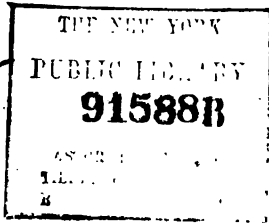
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Tom Taylor's Dramas.*

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# OUR LADY OF LAUGHTER.

A ROMANCE OF COURT AND STAGE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE KING'S PLAYHOUSE.

“**O**RANGES! Oranges! Who'll buy my oranges?”

“Oranges! Buy, buy my golden beauties!”

“All sweet! sweet! sweet! Balls of honey! Balls of honey!”

In the front row of the pit of the new theatre in Drury Lane, with their backs to the stage, stood the orange girls, their baskets piled high with the golden fruit. In more or less melodious tones, and with repartee, sometimes rough, but almost always witty, they called their wares.

The house was rapidly filling with a gay company, for to-night was a gala night and one that was like to replenish the somewhat depleted purse of good Killigrew, the manager. It was



to be the first appearance in public, since his recent serious illness, of his most Christian majesty, Charles the Second; and, moreover, "pretty, witty Nelly," otherwise Mistress Eleanor Gwynne, the bright, particular star of his majesty's servants, was to play her favorite rôle of Florimel in Mr. Dryden's comedy of "Secret Love."

Charles, at this time, was at the height of his popularity. He had been welcomed back with an enthusiasm that knew no bounds, and his affability of manner and charms of person did much to strengthen the attachment of his subjects. In this connection it may be stated that Oughtred the mathematician is said to have died of joy and Urquhart, the translator of Rabelais, of laughter, on hearing of the ecstasy of the English people at the return of old Rowley. But, in spite of the stories that were told of the sad doings at court, the king became more and more endeared to the hearts of the masses.

Wearied to death with the rigid, puritanical rule of Cromwell, the people were only too glad to throw off the yoke and indulge in gaiety of all descriptions. Their freedom of spirit had been only half subdued by Presbyterian persecution, and there was a violent reaction from Puritan severity. The sombre garments of the



Protectorate gave place to gay colored dresses adorned with a profusion of lace, ribbons and embroidery. The playing of the guitar and the singing of anything save psalm tunes were no longer prohibited and dancing was no longer reckoned as one of the deadly sins.

Perhaps one of the most striking results of the restoration of the Stuarts was the revival of the English theatre. The doors of the playhouses had been closed and the voices of the players silenced for nearly a quarter of a century.

When the king returned to the throne great pressure was brought to bear upon him to authorize the erection of new theatres in London; but, acting upon the advice of Clarendon, the leader of the House of Lords, whose aim it was to check as much as possible the flood of dissipation, Charles would not allow more than two, the King's House, which was placed under the management of Thomas Killigrew, and the Duke's House, so called in honor of the king's brother, the Duke of York, controlled by Sir William Davenant. The company of the first called themselves the king's servants, and the company of the second the duke's servants.

There was the greatest rivalry between the two theatres, a rivalry which extended from the managers to the lowest menial in their employ.

The stage properties were new and the dresses costly. On both stages were represented the plays of Shakspeare and Ben Jonson, "which so did take Eliza and our James"; and for both companies Dryden, Wycherly, Southern and others wrote tragedies and comedies.

It was at this period that female characters were first played by women, and for the first time also sovereigns attended stage representations.

"Oranges! Oranges! Buy my oranges!"

The theatre was now nearly full. The house was a large one lighted by candles fixed in sconces. The boxes were in the first tier, and the two just opposite the stage were gaily decorated in honor of the royal party, which had not yet arrived.

The second circle was occupied by worthy tradesmen of the city; and the pit was filled by gallants of the court, ladies in rustling silks and satins but with their faces closely masked, and young gentlemen from the University and the Temple. The only females without vizards were the bona robas, who brazenly displayed their painted cheeks.

Above all the buzz of conversation rose the cries of the fruit girls, conspicuous among whom was a woman with brawny arms and an enormous breadth of shoulder. Her countenance

was ugly and weatherbeaten, and her uncovered head was crowned with a shock of hair so red that it was almost scarlet. This redoubtable female was Mistress Mary Dobson, commonly known as Orange Moll. Her voice was the shrillest and her retorts were the coarsest and most telling.

Far down in the pit, not far from the stage, stood two gentlemen, whose acquaintance it behooves us to make. The one was Harry, Lord Buckhurst, one of the handsomest and most brilliant noblemen of the court, and one of the most impecunious as well. His attire, however, bore no evidence of the latter fact, for he was resplendent in crimson velvet slashed with satin of a paler hue, and in the lace of his cravat and upon his sword-hilt jewels flashed. The state of his finances troubled the careless young fellow but little, so long as Jews and tradespeople were complacent. His companion was a man of quite different appearance and character. His face was plump, smooth and sanctimonious, but there was a wicked sparkle in his round eyes that showed he was not altogether averse to the pleasures of the world, the flesh and the devil. He was dressed rather plainly in a dark plum-colored suit, and upon his head he wore an enormous periwig, the heavy curls of which fell far down upon his

shoulders. Samuel Pepys, who was then about forty years, was a personage of no small importance, especially in his own estimation. A persistent haunter of the steps of the great and influential, and a most adroit flatterer, he had advanced step by step until he had obtained the important position of clerk of the acts of the navy. This gave him an opportunity of constant intercourse with the Duke of York, who was Lord High Admiral, and he soon managed to worm himself into that prince's favor. Buckhurst had no remarkable liking for the politic Samuel, but he tolerated him for his good humor and his amusing qualities. Moreover, the war against the Dutch was then raging, and he was anxious to obtain command of a ship. Mr. Pepys might not be able to advance materially his interests, but still, as a man who had the ear of the Duke of York, it was well to keep on moderately good terms with him.

"By my faith," observed Pepys, critically scanning the house, "our friend Killigrew should be satisfied with this. It is a bitter blow, I hear, to Davenant that the King should come here first."

"Why so?" returned Buckhurst, carelessly. "It is meet that His Majesty should give the preference to his own house. Let Davenant content himself with the Duke. This is a rare

assemblage, indeed," he added, after a pause. "Who would think that the plague had so recently devastated the town?"

Pepys shuddered.

"Ugh! That was a ghastly time, indeed. I did hear to-day that the pest had broken out again in the city, but I give the report no credence."

"May Heaven avert the repetition of such a calamity! Ah! there is Mr. Betterton of the Duke's theatre. A good fellow, that, and a fine actor."

Pepys shrugged his shoulders.

"I care but little for the actors; the actresses interest me. Save Knipp there is not a pretty one among them at the Duke's. I was there a night or two since to see 'A Midsummer Night's Dream.' Poor, insipid stuff, methinks, and that Shakspeare is a tame rogue. Give me Dryden, or Etherege—Etherege above all. My taste is Nelly in Florimel, which we are to see to-night. Ha! Ha! Ha! She do play the most excellent, mad fool I ever saw in my life." Then, lowering his voice, and with a cautious glance around to see that no one was listening, he added: "Oh, she's the merriest rogue alive. I saw her in her tiring room last night. And, he, he, he! What's better still, I kissed her too."

Buckhurst frowned.

"Indeed!" he remarked, gruffly. "And I'll be sworn, she cuffed you soundly."

Pepys' face fell.

"Well, my lord, to tell the truth, in some sort she did," was the rueful response. "She's such a playful thing."

Buckhurst laid his hand heavily on the other's shoulder.

"Hark ye, Mr. Pepys," he said, sternly. "Take my advice, and kiss her no more."

"Why not, my lord?"

"Because if my sword come about your ears, it will sting more sharply than her hand."

Samuel started. He suddenly remembered that rumor averred Lord Buckhurst to be deeply enamoured of the fair actress, and as he prided himself upon his diplomacy, upon always saying the right thing to the right man (an assumption, by the way, which was by no means always justified), he was highly chagrined at his blunder.

"Your lordship is pleased to be facetious," he said, attempting to make a jest of the matter.

"Not in the least," replied Buckhurst, gravely. "I am quite in earnest. So be more careful in the future. Besides, what would Mrs. Pepys say to such wild doings?"

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed Pepys. "My

wife! Poor wretch, she never suspects. But," suddenly becoming serious, "your lordship will not tell her?"

Before Buckhurst could respond, the strident voice of Orange Moll, who had been plying so brisk a trade for some minutes that there had been no need for her to solicit patronage, broke in upon their conversation:

"Oranges! Oranges! Buy my oranges! The true Seville, by my virtue! Oranges, sweet ladies! Oranges, dear gentlemen!"

"Plague take the wench," exclaimed Pepys testily, "to split our ears with her caterwauling."

Moll caught the words, and in a trice she turned upon the speaker.

"Caterwauling, forsooth!" she snapped, in tones that made Pepys wince. "So, you would insult an honest woman, would you, Master Pepys? Oh, I know you! Did not I see you the other night with Knipp at the Saracen's Head, and ——"

"Hush," whispered Pepys, approaching closer to her, amidst the laughter of those in the front rows. "The foul fiend's in your tongue. Here, take this and be still."

Moll glanced at the broad gold piece he placed in her palm, grinned, nodded, and much to Pepys' relief resumed her appeals for trade



“Oranges! Oranges! Who’ll buy of Orange Mary?”

“Mary!” laughed a young gallant near by. “Why, I’ve known her as Moll these five and twenty years.”

“Well, if you have, Major Denham,” retorted the virago, tartly, “don’t boast of the acquaintance and shame me before company!”

A blare of trumpets silenced the laughter that greeted this sally. At the same moment ushers bearing lighted candelabras entered the royal boxes. The king was approaching. The orange girls hastily beat a retreat to the rear of the house, and the entire audience rose to greet the advent of royalty.

The band struck up “Britons Strike Home,” and followed by half a dozen richly dressed gentlemen Charles appeared in one of the boxes, and at the same moment the queen, with her maids of honor all closely masked, entered the other.

The king advanced to the front of the box, bowed right and left, and then seated himself in the throne-like chair which had been prepared for him. His majesty’s person was an indication of his character, handsome, graceful, careless, the marks of dissipation just beginning to show themselves upon his aristocratic features.

“The king seems to have entirely recovered from his illness,” remarked Buckhurst to Pepys as they resumed their places.

“Yes,” replied Pepys, in a low voice, “and since his recovery, they do say, the Duchess is quite out of favor.”

Honest Samuel was a very prince of news-mongers and always had all the details of the latest scandal at his tongue’s end.

“Will Chiffinch tells me that it was a rare scene,” he continued, thoroughly enjoying the imparting of the news, “the quarrel between them. First the lady scolded and the king swore, and then the king scolded and the lady swore, but his majesty was firm for once.”

“The Duchess out of favor,” said Buckhurst thoughtfully, for the woman who was uppermost in the king’s capricious affections was for the nonce the most powerful personage in the kingdom. “And who is her successor? The fair Jennings for a thousand!”

“Tush!” ejaculated Pepys, with a lofty smile, as befitted one possessed of superior information. “The lady who has ousted the Duchess, fair Jennings, Moll Davis and all the rest is—Hold, if I mistake not that is she, seated at the right of the queen.”

Buckhurst glanced up at the royal boxes. “That leaves me no better informed than be-

fore," he said. "Her features are indistinguishable."

"What, my lord? Can there be any mistaking that superb figure and regal bearing, and, indeed, why should not her bearing be regal for in her veins flows the blood royal?"

"Lady Frances Stuart!"

"Your lordship has said it. His majesty has cast his royal sheeps eyes upon her—May the Lord forgive me! I mean no disloyalty! Ay, Will Chiffinch says that he is deeper in love with Lady Frances than he has been with any woman since Lucy Walters. Why, 'twas through jealousy of her that the Duchess broke out the other day."

"This will be sour news for Richmond on his return."

"To be sure! To be sure!" assented Samuel, with a smack of his lips at a suggestion which gave a new savor to the scandal. "His grace of Richmond has long paid suit to the fair lady."

"Why, he is a regular salt-water Strephon. He has a miniature of La Belle Stuart hanging in his cabin and, I verily believe, worships it as Russians do their icons."

"If the Duke returns shortly to London, before the present ardor of the King is diminished, what will be the outcome?"

"That is his look-out."

“By the way, my lord, you were in the late action. Was it a victory?”

“I know not whether it was a victory or not. I saw nothing but smoke. Ask Richmond. He will be at court in a day or two with full reports and a Dutch flag.”

“A Dutch flag! Ah! his Grace of Richmond is a man worthy to defend us, eh, my lord?”

“He is brave enough, but, pshaw, he’s a dull water drinker,” replied Buckhurst, a little weary of his companion’s loquacity.

“As your lordship says, a sober knave,” assented Pepys, complacently. “But, to return to——”

“Hush! the play is about to begin.”

The prompter’s bell was heard and the curtains parted.

The performance proceeded rather slowly, until there dashed upon the stage the picturesque figure of a young cavalier in silken doublet, velvet cloak, high boots and broad-brimmed hat with long sweeping plumes. It was Nell Gwynne as Florimel, and, as the crowded house recognized its favorite, it burst into a hurricane of applause.

The face of the popular actress was not perhaps strictly beautiful, but it possessed a charm of its own far more bewitching than any mere regularity of feature. Her skin was extremely

fair, with a tint in the cheeks as exquisite as a blush rose. Her hair was a rich warm-hued auburn, her eyebrows brown and very thick. Her hazel eyes with their curling dark lashes, were not very large, but remarkably brilliant, and her nose was just enough turned up to give her an indescribably piquant expression. When she laughed, her eyes would close until they became almost invisible, and an entrancing dimple would form itself in either cheek. Added to this, her figure was well-nigh perfection, her voice clear, sweet and musical as a silver bell, and her every movement full of natural, un-studied grace.

This was the first time that the king had ever beheld Nell, and the trimness of her figure and the radiant brilliancy of her laughing face at once captured the fancy of the royal voluptuary. As the play proceeded, Charles became more and more interested in the young actress and several times led the applause himself, a fact which several of the courtiers were not slow to mark and inwardly draw deductions from.

In the box with the king were the Duke of Buckingham, who possessed great influence over Charles, largely gained through his skill in pandering to the royal pleasures; Lord Shaftesbury, the lord privy seal of the council, a statesman not without a certain amount of patriotism,

but with a much keener eye to his own advancement; and Sir George Etherege, a rake and a dramatist, whose sprightly comedies of "Love in a Tub" and "The Man of Mode" had met with much popular approval.

At the end of the first act, the king turned to his companions, and with that easy familiarity with which he was accustomed to treat his intimates, remarked:

"Odds fish, gentlemen, but the jade is wholly delightful. Not half enough has been said in her praise. Is any one of you happy enough to have the honor of her acquaintance?"

"Not I," replied Buckingham, inwardly cursing the mischance that forced him to answer in the negative; for, understanding Charles as he did, he fully comprehended the purport of the question.

"Nor I," said Shaftesbury.

"Nor I," repeated Sir George Etherege. "But," he added, after a moment's pause, "if reports be true, your Majesty, my Lord Buckhurst knows well fair Mistress Gwynne."

"Ah! my lord Buckhurst," said the king, slowly. "Methinks I see his lordship in the pit below. Good Sir George, would you kindly seek him out, and say I crave his company?"

Etherege bowed and retired, to return a few minutes later followed by Buckhurst, who was

received with great affability by his sovereign. Charles admired the young nobleman for his courageous spirit and fine powers of mind, but Buckhurst was so lazy that, though the king seemed to court him to be a favorite, he would not give himself the trouble that belonged to the part. Moreover he hated the court and despised the brainless foplings who haunted it, seeking a stray ray of the sunshine of royal favor.

“The play is excellent,” began Charles, motioning Buckhurst to be seated, “this Mr. Dryden has a rare wit.”

“Yes, sire,” replied Buckhurst, “but for my part I prefer Etherege,” with a smile at Sir George, who was one of his greatest friends.

“Ah! of course, Etherege as a playwright stands alone,” said the king graciously. And then, with a merry twinkle in his eye, and a glance at Shaftesbury, who was resplendent in a voluminous wig of the palest flaxen hue, he added: “There is one thing, my lord, that always puzzles me at the theatre. Perhaps your lordship may be able to inform me.”

“Whatever information I possess is ever at your Majesty’s service.”

“Pray, then, what is the reason we never see a rogue in a play, but odds fish, they always clap him on a black periwig, when it is well

known that one of the greatest rogues in England always wears a fair one?"

Shaftesbury flushed scarlet, while the others, including the king himself, laughed so uproariously that it attracted the attention of a goodly portion of the house.

"Nay, my good Shaftesbury," said the king, stifling his laughter, for, in spite of his love of a joke, he was ever kindly. "Nay, my good Shaftesbury, regain your countenance. I meant nothing. I appreciate your worth. My Lord Buckhurst, a word with you in private."

He rose, and motioning Buckhurst to follow him, he retreated to the retiring room behind the box.

Buckingham's face grew black. He formed a pretty correct guess as to the nature of the interview about to take place, and he was intensely annoyed that his own particular functions should be thus usurped by another.

"My lord," said Charles, carelessly, when he was alone with Buckhurst, "they tell me that you have an acquaintance with this delightful Florimel."

"Nelly?" replied Buckhurst, somewhat surprised. "Yes, your Majesty, I know her."

"Well?"

"She sups with me, sire, after the play to-night."



“Indeed!” responded Charles, with a smile. “Perhaps you might consent to allow a third to join the party.”

When Buckhurst heard this he could have bitten his tongue out for his imprudent speech. He understood only too well who this third would be, and the addition was anything but to his taste.

“A most respectable person, you understand,” continued the king, “a certain mercer of the city, named—named Robinson.”

“Any friend of your Majesty’s will be welcome,” replied Buckhurst, with a certain constraint.

“In his name and mine, I thank your lordship. Mr. Robinson will meet you in front of the Rainbow in Fleet Street, half an hour after the play is over. Be prompt.”

“I shall not fail, your Majesty.”

“And what is much more to the point, see that the fair lady does not fail either.”

“I have her promise, but the promises of women are not to be depended upon, and of all changeable feather-brained wenches, Nell Gwynne is the most fickle.”

“You can doubtless find means to hold her to her appointment, for this time, at all events,” replied the king. And then, he added quizzically, “They do say, Buckhurst, that you have

half the women at both the theatres sighing for your *beaux yeux*. I intimated but now that my Lord Shaftesbury was one of the greatest rogues in all England, but, upon my life, I believe that you are *the* greatest."

"For a subject, sire, perhaps I am," was the dry response, uttered without a moment's hesitation or reflection.

The king stared and then laughed heartily. The merry monarch, through indolence perhaps, was not at all quick to take offence, and he was that rare exception, a jester quite capable of appreciating and enjoying a joke against himself.

"Odds fish!" he exclaimed, employing his favorite expletive, "that is not very complimentary, but indeed, I am not at all sure but that you are about right," and sovereign and subject laughed together like two jolly, boon companions.

But Buckhurst was not laughing when he returned to his place in the pit beside Mr. Pepys. He was anything but pleased that he should be forced to endure the companionship of this "Mr. Robinson," when he had hoped to be alone with Nell.

Honest Samuel was full of curiosity as to why his companion had been summoned to the king's presence; but his efforts to obtain in-

formation met with so sharp a response, that he was forced to desist from further questioning.

As Buckhurst watched the charming acting of the woman with whom he was perhaps more infatuated than he had ever been with any other, he thought to himself, not without a certain rancor :

“Why need he force himself upon us? Let him take the maids of honor and welcome, but when it comes to the players—peste! ’tis scandalous!”

## CHAPTER II.

### A SUPPER WITH ROYALTY.

**S**T. SWITHIN had had a firm hold on the weather all day, but late in the afternoon the clouds had broken, and the evening was as clear and bright as the heart of man could desire. The streets of London, poorly paved and ill-lighted, were unpleasant enough for pedestrianism at all times, but, after the rain, they were well-nigh impassable, filled as they were with mud and slush. Although the beauty of the night attracted large crowds out of doors, almost every one was making use of the waterway in preference to walking or driving. At every few steps along the Thames there were little docks where for a very reasonable price one could hire boats denominated "Oars" when two rowers were employed and "Sculls" when but one was made use of.

Although it was not more than half past eight, the play had been over nearly an hour, for in those days theatrical performances began at the early hour of four. In front of the Rain-

bow Tavern in Fleet Street paced nervously back and forth a man clothed in plain but handsome garments of puce-colored cloth. His every movement betrayed irritation, as his eyes scanned the almost deserted thoroughfare, and every now and then an ejaculation, scarcely fit for ears polite, would escape his lips. Just as his patience was well-nigh exhausted, a cab came rumbling around the corner, the wheels so clogged with mud that the somewhat sorry looking animal could only with the greatest difficulty drag along the vehicle. It stopped before the tavern, and a gentleman alighted and then assisted a lady to do likewise.

"Ah, there they are at last," muttered the man who had been waiting, as he hastened forward to join the new comers.

"You are late, my Lord Buckhurst."

"Your pardon, but a lady's toilet requires time," and he proceeded to present "Mr. Robinson, a mercer of the Strand," to his companion, Mistress Eleanor Gwynne, who was masked and closely enveloped in a voluminous mantle with the hood drawn closely over the head.

"Where shall we go for supper?" asked Buckhurst when the ceremony was accomplished.

"That is for fair Mistress Gwynne to de-

cide," gallantly responded Mr. Robinson, or to give him his true title, the king.

"What do you say, Nelly?"

"Oh, as for me," came in musical accents from beneath the mask, "give me one of the Westminster taverns. These Fleet Street houses furnish entertainment fit for neither man nor beast."

"A Westminster tavern be it then," said the pretended mercer, advancing to offer himself as escort to the actress; but Buckhurst was too quick for him, for drawing Nelly's hand through his arm, he started in the direction of the river, leaving his sovereign to trudge along by himself.

It was only a short distance, along Water Lane, to White Friars Stairs, where they had no difficulty in procuring such a conveyance as they desired. Here again Buckhurst came off the victor, for handing Nell in, he proceeded to seat himself beside her, forcing Charles to take his place at the other end of the boat. The king was inwardly chafing at his lordship's presumptuousness, but he determined to outwit him before the evening was over.

Propelled by two vigorous oarsmen the boat glided rapidly along the smooth bosom of the river, which was crowded with crafts of all description, bearing gay parties of merry-makers.

One by one, the many splendid and famous buildings with which the banks were lined loomed into view and then faded away in the darkness. Pembroke, built of beautiful stone, but which looked more like a prison than a residence; Somerset, where lived the queen-mother; Buckingham, conspicuous for its fine water-gate; Northumberland, broader and higher than the others, with four little brick towers, one at each corner; and finally the imposing proportions of Westminster itself, which had been formerly a monastery, but where Parliament now assembled.

Here our little party disembarked. As they crossed the Palace Yard, from the stone tower at the north entrance, the sonorous bell, known as Great Tom, pealed forth the hour of nine. Close to Westminster were two ale-houses, each in high repute for the excellence of its fare, both solid and liquid, and bearing the startling names of "Heaven" and "Hell."

"Which one shall it be, Mistress Gwynne?" asked the soi-disant tradesman, as they emerged into the open place where the taverns were situated.

"It is difficult to decide," replied Nell, demurely. "If you follow me, you will probably declare yourselves in Heaven, but if I follow you, I shall certainly go to the other place."

“No place, which was glorified by your presence, could be anything but paradise.”

“Indeed! Suppose we try if that be true, and so let us go to—ahem.”

And so to—ahem, they went. If the nether region at all resembles the tavern which had borrowed its name, it has been sadly slandered and must be a very comfortable place indeed. The room into which the actress and her two companions were shown was delightfully bright and cozy, with its blazing wood fire, its crimson draperies and its really handsome oak furniture.

“There, is not this better than the Rainbow?” asked Nell, as she threw off her cloak and tossed aside her mask.

If anything, she was prettier off the stage than on. Her dress was plain, but exceedingly neat, and it fitted her trim figure to perfection. It consisted of a skirt and bodice of blue shalloon, without trimming of any sort. The sleeves reached to the elbow, displaying the ivory shapeliness of her arms, and about her neck was a broad white collar edged with narrow lace. Her sunny, rippling hair was gathered back loosely and tied with a ribbon of the same azure hue as her simple gown.

As the royal connoisseur of woman's charms gazed upon her loveliness, there shone in his



eyes an admiration which he made no attempt to disguise. "I knew I was not mistaken," he exclaimed fervidly. "In spite of its name, this place is Heaven, for I see an angel before me."

Nell flashed one swift glance at him, a glance which told her, however, that this Mr. Robinson was uncommonly handsome, and she was not displeased at the discovery, for the volatile player had a keen eye for beauty, especially when it assumed a masculine form.

"An angel with sadly bedraggled wings, I fear," she answered, half jestingly, half seriously, as she turned toward the fire, and lifting her skirts a trifle, rested one daintily shod foot upon the burnished fender.

"What will it please your worships to order?" asked the landlord, a rubicund individual with a lordly paunch, who had remained standing obsequiously at the door, after ushering his guests into the room.

"A slice of hung beef and a flagon of Burton ale for me," said Nelly.

"Tilly-vally, dost take us for paupers!" ejaculated Charles, in mock dismay. "Nay, nay, landlord, mind her not. A venison pâté, some neats tongues, sweetmeats and plenty of wine. Uncork the Frontiniac, the Moselle and the bright Claret. Will not that suit your ladyship better?" he added, as the landlord depart-

ed to fill the order, beaming at the thought of the profits he was about to make.

“Well, beef and ale are perhaps not exactly food for angels,” retorted Nelly, with a glance into the smiling face at the other side of the fireplace, “but at all events, they are English and therefore better than French fripperies. However, have your own way.”

“You are loyal, Mistress Gwynne.”

“Loyal!” was the enthusiastic answer. “Loyal to the tips of my fingers. I revere England and I love his Majesty, though they do say he is a wild devil, but I suppose that comes from his association with Buckingham, Rochester, and you, my Lord Buckhurst, who are the worst of them all.”

Here to Nell’s intense surprise, Mr. Robinson burst into an uproarious fit of laughter, in which he was joined by Buckhurst, who had been sitting somewhat moodily apart.

“Well,” she said, “I don’t know why my words should cause such merriment, but at all events, it is an agreeable change in you, my lord of sulky countenance.”

At this, Buckhurst rose and approached the fireplace.

“That’s well,” continued Nelly. “Heavens, man, this is to be a feast, not a funeral! Your friend is much more entertaining.”

And with a coquettish smile, she extended her hand, which Charles was not slow to seize.

“There, there, you need not squeeze it so violently.”

Buckhurst frowned, which Nell observing, exclaimed, saucily :

“I’ faith, my lord, no jealous vapors here. Nell Gwynne is no man’s exclusive property.”

Before Buckhurst could reply, the landlord entered, followed by two white-aproned drawers bearing the supper, which looked and smelt most appetizingly.

“Ah,” said the king, approvingly, “I see this is the house for the true stuff.”

“The true stuff!” echoed the landlord, proudly. “Indeed it is. Why, this is a house frequented by kings and courtiers.”

“The devil!” thought Charles. “Can the fellow know us?” And he exchanged a glance with Buckhurst; but mine host’s next words dispelled this suspicion.

“Ay, and rogues, too, highwaymen and house-breakers; all knaves, both of high and low degree, come here, and——”

“That will do, my good man. Fill the bowls.”

“With your pleasure,” said the landlord, a trifle offended at having his loquacity thus cut short.

“No, not with our pleasure,” said Charles, with a laugh, “but with good wine.”

When the host and his men had retired, and Nell was seated at the bountifully spread table, with the king on one side and Buckhurst on the other, Charles raised a glass filled with ruby liquid, and said :

“My lord, as it is our good fortune to have with us so brilliant a representative of the votaries of Thespis, I’ll give you : Success to the stage, and a health to the players !”

“Success to the stage !” repeated Nelly, after the toast had been drunk. “I hope it with all my heart, but to-night was the first good house we have had in many a day and all because his majesty deigned to be present. The king and the courtiers have so many things to amuse them, so many other diversions, that they seldom think of us poor players, though we are by special privilege denominated His Majesty’s Servants. Ah ! would the king but condescend to enjoy more often the pleasures of the theatre His Majesty’s Servants would be very thankful to him.”

“He will do so, hereafter,” exclaimed Charles ardently. “After this night, my dainty Florimel, you will not have that reproach to offer him.”

“Eh!” cried Nell, opening her gray eyes wide in astonishment.

“I mean,” stammered Charles, in embarrassment. “I mean ——”

“He means,” interrupted Buckhurst, coming to his rescue, “he means that his majesty, having once seen you, cannot fail to return again and again to the scene illumined by the brilliancy of your genius.”

“Exactly. I thank you, my lord,” said Charles. “For sure such talent and beauty were never before united in one person. Those cheeks, like blooming roses——”

“Take care, Mr. Robinson. Roses bear thorns,” laughed Nell, raising her hand armed with its pink nails warningly, for the lips of her admirer had approached dangerously close to the peach-like surface he was praising.

Buckhurst, although inwardly raging, did not dare to protest, but he resolved to do all that he could to prevent any further meeting between the king and the actress. His usual buoyancy entirely deserted him, and, consumed by jealousy, he remained moody and silent while the other two, apparently oblivious of his presence, chattered away gaily. Every moment, Charles became more and more fascinated by his fair companion. Her gaiety of spirits chimed in well with his own lightheart-

edness; the airiness of her wit and the brilliancy of her badinage, together with her irresistible beauty, completely captivated him. Nell, on her part, was no less pleased with her new acquaintance; a strange, hitherto unknown feeling was stirring at her heart, a feeling which half charmed, half frightened her. In her varied career, her morals had been none of the best. She had had many love affairs, but no spark of real love had ever been kindled in her bosom. Like a butterfly, she had flitted from flower to flower, but nestled in the heart of none. She was vaguely conscious that this evening was the dawn of a new life to her. She listened to this mercer of the city, as she supposed him to be, with an interest that no gallant of the court had ever been able to inspire in her, and never had she herself been more brilliant and fascinating.

“Sing to us, Nell,” suddenly interrupted Buckhurst, in a voice thick with the manifold potations he had indulged in to drown his jealous uneasiness.

Nell started. She had entirely forgotten his very existence, and yet, hitherto, Buckhurst had been her favorite amidst the many who had paid her their court.

“Yes, sing to us, Mistress Gwynne,” seconded the king.

“I will, on one condition.”

“Name it. It is granted in advance.”

“Do not call me Mistress Gwynne. I am Nelly to my friends, and Nelly I would be to you.”

“Then sing, Nelly,” said Charles, in those low, caressing tones he knew so well how to employ. “But I would fain be something nearer than friend.”

Nell blushed, and then grew hotly indignant at herself for having done so. What, Nell Gwynne coloring like a country wench at the most ordinary words of gallantry. Fie! Fie! This folly must be stopped.

“What shall I sing?” she asked abruptly.

“Anything. Any song issuing from those lips would gain something of their sweetness.”

“Hang the man!” thought Nell. “I am sorely afraid that—” and then thrusting away the thought, she began to sing, her fresh, clear voice filling the room with its exquisite melody :

“Here’s a health unto his Majesty, with a fa, la, la.  
 Conversion to his enemies, with a fa, la, la ;  
 And he that will not pledge his health  
 I wish him neither wit nor wealth,  
 Nor yet a rope to hang himself,  
 With a fa, la, la, la,  
 With a fa, la, la, la.”

“’Fore Gad,” spluttered Buckhurst, who was now entirely under the influence of the fiery wine, “a mosht exshellent song, mosht exshellently shung,” and his head fell forward upon his arms which were resting upon the table.

Charles looked at him benignly over his shoulder and with a smile, hummed the words of the old song :

“Good store of good claret supplies everything  
And he that is drunk is as great as a king.”

“Well, let him sleep,” he added. “For my part I am only too well pleased. We can talk in freedom now.” And, moving his chair close to that of Nell, he took one of her hands in his. She cast down her eyes, in real or affected modesty, but she did not attempt to release herself.

“Nelly,” murmured Charles, “Nelly, I love you.”

Poor Nell’s heart was fluttering, but she answered bravely enough :

“Love! Bah! They all tell me that.”

“But not with my truth. Ah, believe in the ardor of my flame.”

“I fear, like many flames, it will end in smoke. Love! Pish! You have known me me only an hour.”

“What does love know of time? I have known you since the beginning of the world.



Nay, sweet, do not turn away your eyes. I could gaze in them forever."

"You must have courage to do that."

"Why?"

"Because you see yourself in them," was the saucy response.

"Odds fish, am I so ugly as that? Then do not look at me, but listen to the pleadings of my heart that beats only for you."

"Mr. Robinson, you must have had an infinite deal of practice to make love so well."

"I swear to you I never spoke words of love to woman before."

The dimples in Nell's cheek deepened, and she glanced at him with a mischievous light in her sparkling eyes. Then the ripple of her laughter rang out, so fresh, so joyous, so contagious, that Charles perforce joined in, and for a moment or two they laughed together with the careless, happy gaiety of two children.

"Nay, we will talk seriously, then," said Charles, at last. "Putting aside my love, which is true enough, Heaven knows, I am rich, abundantly rich. Nelly, I'll pour heaps of wealth into your lap; you shall be studded with diamonds; music shall float about you; servants shall bow before you; all things shall come as you wish; you shall be a queen almost."

“Almost! Saving the coronation and a few such ceremonies.”

“You are cruel. I love you.”

The three words, *I love you*, were an old, old story to her. They had been repeated to her by men of all ages and stations, but never before had they spoken to her heart. She was alarmed and she longed to be alone. Under the empire of a new, irresistible force, she rose and, before Charles could guess her intention, rang the bell.

“What is it you want?” he asked, in some surprise.

“I want to go home.”

“Home! But, Nelly, we must not part in this way. You are not offended?”

No answer.

“Forgive me, if I spoke too soon or too strangely. But through gazing in your eyes, I somehow lost my head. I was blinded by light. Is not the excuse a fair one?”

“No; an owl would have made as good,” was the snappish, though not ill-humored reply.

A knock at the door prevented any further colloquy.

Nell cried “Come in!” and the landlord entered.

“Did your worship wish the bill?”

“Yes, bring your bill at once,” interposed

Nell, imperiously. "It is late, and I wish to go home."

The landlord bowed and retired. As he did so, a sudden, horrible thought struck the king. In changing his clothes he had forgotten to take any money, and he had not a penny to bless his name with. But, fortunately, Buckhurst was there. Approaching the sleeping nobleman, he shook him roughly.

"Buckhurst! Buckhurst! wake up."

Buckhurst stirred heavily, and raised his head, his eyes blinking drowsily.

"Buckhurst! Rouse yourself, man."

"Your Majesty! I ask your majesty's pardon—I——"

"Hush!" commanded the king. But it was too late. Nell had overheard. She gave one quick, searching look at the face of the man she had known as Mr. Robinson, and the truth was revealed to her. She had been supping with her lord and sovereign the king of England. She knew now why that face had been vaguely familiar to her, although for the life of her she had not been able to remember where she had seen it before. She had frequently seen the king's portraits, and Buckhurst's unguarded words had betrayed the original. As a full realization of it all came over her she turned a

shade pale and a troubled look shone in her eyes.

“Here is the bill, sir,” said the landlord, entering and presenting a slip of paper.

Charles took the bill and drew Buckhurst a little one side. The latter was now fully awake, and, having slept off the fumes of the wine, was almost himself again.

“Pay this fellow, will you?” said Charles, in a low tone.

“Pay!” stammered Buckhurst, in dismay.

“Pay, I—I——”

“Yes, pay. I’ll return it to you.”

“But—but—has your majesty no money? I have none.”

“Odds fish! And I haven’t my own likeness, even in copper. Here’s a pretty mess! And the bill,” holding it up to the light, “is four pounds, three shillings and sixpence. Four pounds, three shillings and sixpence!” he added aloud.

“Venison is high, and you commanded the choicest wines,” remarked the landlord, apologetically.

“I am not complaining of the bill,” began Charles, at his wits’ end. “But the fact is I—that is, we——”

In an instant the landlord’s whole demeanour changed. This was not the first case of the

kind he had had to deal with, and he was quick to guess at the reason of his guest's hesitation.

"Oh, I see," he said, roughly, "that your stomach had not taken counsel of your pocket."

Nelly had been watching the scene, and was too quick-witted not to take in the situation. Her sense of humor was very keen, and in spite of the trepidation and dismay she felt at the discovery of her would-be lover's identity, she could not but enjoy the ludicrousness of the situation in which he found himself. Her love of fun for the moment overpowered all other considerations, and stepping forward, she calmly took the account from Charles' hand.

"Why, what is all this?" she said, with the most innocent manner in the world. "The bill? Oh, well, pay the good man. Four pounds, three and sixpence! Why, 'tisn't a grain from one of the heaps of gold to be poured into my lap."

"The fact is," said Charles, awkwardly, "both his lordship here and myself have forgotten our purses."

"Well," said Nelly, in the same ingenuous tone, but with just a little undercurrent of malice, "if you have no money, leave one of the diamonds with which I was to be besprinkled. A very little one would serve to pay the account."

Charles did not know what to reply. He would almost have given one of the crown jewels to have been well out of the scrape.

“I’m sure the charges are most reasonable,” continued Nell, now quite mistress of herself once more, and enjoying the whole affair with the utmost zest. “A venison pasty, seven and eightpence. I don’t see how deer can be sold so cheaply, unless it was stolen from one of the royal parks.” A smile stole over Charles’ face at the thought of being dunned to pay for his own property. “Neat’s tongues, four and six. Very little, indeed. Sugar sops—hum-hum—claret—Frontiniac—Moselle—hum-hum—with bread and wax candles, the whole amounting to four pounds, three shillings and sixpence of his majesty’s current money.”

“Most decidedly of his majesty’s money,” thought the king, “if his majesty only had it.”

“Come, come, Mr. Robinson,” said Nell, turning upon him her laughing eyes, “as they say in the play-book, *pay the Jew his principal and let him go.*”

“I am no Jew,” growled the landlord, who was now pretty well out of patience, “but a plain-spoken, simple Christian. Nevertheless, I will go on receipt of my money.”

Charles cast an appealing glance at Buckhurst, which was met only with a despondent

shake of the head. Then he turned again to the landlord.

“The fact is,” he said slowly, “I must make a friend of you.”

“Not for credit,” retorted mine host sturdily. “If you do not pay up at once, I’ll have you put in limbo.”

“Give the man your place of residence and let him call for his money,” suggested Nell, with malice aforethought, for she knew right well that it would be impossible to act upon her hint.

“Have you a reputable place of residence?” asked the landlord, doubtfully.

At this question, both Charles and Buckhurst, in spite of all their efforts, could not refrain from laughing, which action only served to increase the landlord’s irritation. But he knew that he would gain nothing by venting his anger and so he had recourse to stratagem.

“I might give you time,” he said slowly, “if you are sure that you will pay.”

“Absolutely sure,” replied Charles, eagerly. “Besides, I will reward you with——”

“Gold, diamonds and music floating about him,” murmured wicked Nelly, just loud enough for the king to hear.

“If you will open yonder door,” said the landlord, “you will find a passage leading to

my partner's office. If he consents to release you on your promise to pay, I will agree."

"Blockhead!" ejaculated Charles. "Why didn't you say so before?" And, followed by Buckhurst, he strode toward the door, flung it open and passed through.

As soon as they were both in the next room, for it was really a room and not a passage, the landlord rushed to the door, slammed it to, and bolted it securely.

Instantly there came a thunderous pounding upon the panels, accompanied by angry demands to be released.

Nell, choking with laughter, threw herself down in one of the chairs, and gave full vent to her mirth. As soon as she could control her merriment, she beckoned the landlord to approach.

"Your bill is four pounds, three shillings and sixpence, I believe," she said.

"Yes, your ladyship."

"Oh, I am no ladyship. Give me my proper title—the Abbess of Drury Lane. Well," drawing a well-filled purse from her pocket, "I suppose you must be paid. Here—one—two—three—four—three shillings and sixpence. Now, receipt the bill."

The landlord, with profuse thanks, did as he was bid.



“Now, retire and order me a cab at once. I will release your prisoners.”

The man, now thoroughly satisfied, bowed low and left the room.

“Varlet!” came from the room beyond. “Let us out or we will pull the house down about your ears.”

“Oh, pray don’t,” cried Nell, in her ringing voice, “at least, until I can get out of it.”

As she spoke, she unbolted and opened the door. Charles and Buckhurst rushed into the room.

“Where is the cheating villain?” exclaimed Buckhurst. “He shall pay dearly for this.”

“Oh, best let him alone,” replied Nell, coolly, “your bill is paid. Let that suffice, although, I vow, it is scarce polite to invite a lady to supper and make her pay the score. However, I bear no malice.”

“Nelly,” murmured the king, “you have done me a great service, and, for all your incredulity, you shall have those diamonds yet.”

“I should have been home long ago,” said Nell, paying no attention to the remark. “My lord Buckhurst, will you kindly see if my cab is at the door?”

Buckhurst was obliged to obey, although he had no fancy for leaving her alone with the king even for a moment.

“Nelly, you are one in a thousand,” said Charles when Buckhurst had disappeared, “and I love you.”

“So you have said more than once this evening.”

“And I will prove it, too. To show you my sincerity, I will tell you a secret, a secret to be sure which you must know, sooner or later. Listen. I am not the simple tradesman you suppose me.”

Nell started, but, immediately recovering herself, she asked with well feigned surprise :

“Indeed! Who are you, then?”

“The king!”

This announcement certainly did not produce the effect that Charles had expected, for, acting better even than she had done on the stage, Nell burst into a musical peal of laughter.

“Oh, Lud!” she cried. “To be sure, a king without a *crown*. Ha! Ha! Ha! His majesty would not be complimented if he could hear you.”

“But I assure you,” said Charles, seriously, “I am speaking the truth. I am the king.”

“Then, if you are the king,” she retorted, mocking his grave tones, “I pray your majesty to do something for us poor players.”

“There is one player, rich beyond compare in her beauty, both of mind and person, for whom

I would gladly do anything. Do not be cruel to me, Nelly. Tell me when I may see you again."

"I am at the theatre every night, and surely the first gentleman of the kingdom will experience no difficulty in persuading Killigrew to admit him to my tiring-room."

"I shall be there, Nelly," he exclaimed, passionately; "I shall be there to-morrow night."

Nell flushed beneath the ardor of his gaze, but still smiling, she managed to answer in the same jesting tone :

"I shall expect you then. But I hear the rumble of wheels. So," with a sweeping courtesy, which for grace and elegance would have done no discredit to the finest of the court ladies, "so farewell until to-morrow, *Sire!*"

And before Charles could utter a word of protest at her sudden departure, the airy, dainty, radiant creature had vanished, leaving the king a prey to the mingled tortures and delights which that little rascally blind boy Cupid was constantly inflicting upon his too susceptible and alas, ever inconstant heart.

### CHAPTER III.

#### LA BELLE STUART.

• **T**HE palace of Whitehall, a heritage of the time of the Tudors, had witnessed more thrilling and varied scenes, scenes of joy and revelry, scenes of sorrow and despair, than perhaps any of the other famous buildings of London. Situated almost at the extreme end of the city, it occupied a large amount of ground, but it was very low, built of brick, and with no architectural pretensions whatever. It was in the form of a hollow square, and the enclosed space was laid out as a garden, in the center of which rose a good sized pavilion in the Greek style, the pure white marble of which it was built forming an agreeable contrast to the green of the shrubbery and the red walls of the palace itself.

One morning, about a week after the king's first meeting with Mistress Gwynne, there were gathered together in the matted gallery, an apartment of noble proportions overlooking the gardens, a score or so of people, waiting to prof-

fer petitions of various nature to the king. The matted gallery was the place where on certain days Charles was supposed to give public audiences, although the indolent monarch appeared or not as it happened to suit his pleasure.

Seated at a table at one end of the room was Lord Shaftesbury, busily engaged with a formidable mass of documents. The men, high in the councils of the king, had no sinecure, for his majesty hated public business, and as a rule left everything to the heads of the various departments. When he chose to exercise it, however, he showed more observation and a keener and truer judgment of men than one would have imagined from the easy and careless manner that was natural to him. His councillors were not always of the best, for his necessities often compelled him to select such persons in the management of the nation's affairs who were more suited for his present purpose than approved of by his discernment. Like all the members of his charming, unhappy family, it was his weakness to be easily imposed upon and to trust too much on all occasions to others. Shaftesbury, however, was a faithful, conscientious servant, save that he had somewhat too keen an eye for his own interests; and although the heavy conversation of the nobleman bored him, Charles thoroughly appreciated his worth.

Near a broad open window, which looked out upon the gardens, stood Lord Buckhurst, Sir George Etherege and Sir Thomas Ogle, the latter a pronounced dandy, but with more good sense than his foppish manner would presage. The three were staunch friends, and the escapades of which they had been the joint heroes would fill a good-sized volume.

“Tell me, Harry,” Ogle was saying, in the high pitched voice which he affected, “what brings you to court? Your laziness sheds the light of his countenance too rarely upon this classic place.”

“I want a ship,” replied Buckhurst, with a sigh. “To fight the Dutchmen will be a diversion. I scarce know, however, how to bring my suit to his majesty’s notice, now that the influence of the Duchess, who stood my friend, has waned.”

This was said in all sincerity, for in spite of the night at the tavern where he had been hail fellow well-met with the king, Buckhurst would have considered it beneath him to presume upon that fact. In this he was very unlike Buckingham, who, if it had been his good fortune to bring the king and a pretty actress together, would have seen that he was well recompensed for his trouble.

“It is true that Her Grace of Portsmouth is

wofully out of favor," said Etherege. "They say that she is crying her pretty eyes out. She might well spare herself the trouble, for Charles is too good-natured not to forgive her in the end. But, meanwhile, there will be an inter-regnum. I wonder who the next royal favorite will be."

"'Tis no French lady of quality this time," remarked Ogle. "Have you not observed that His Majesty has been four times to Drury Lane in twice that number of days, and each time little Nelly played? Will Chiffinch declares that he is mad with love for the fresh little rogue."

"It's a lie!" exclaimed Buckhurst, fiercely.

"How!" cried Ogle, clapping his hand upon his sword-hilt.

"Of that knave, Chiffinch," added Buckhurst, recovering his composure.

"Here comes Sam Pepys across the garden," said Etherege. "Let's ask him. He'll be certain to know all the latest gossip."

Followed by a slim youth of a serious cast of countenance and clothed in sombre black, Pepys entered the room by another window and approached Shaftesbury.

"Bear yourself easily, John," he whispered, an admonition which failed of its effect, for a being more awkward and ungainly than his

companion could scarcely be imagined. "My lord," he continued aloud, addressing the Lord Privy Seal, "allow me to introduce to your notice my brother from the University. A modest boy for whom I crave your lordship's indulgence. I had a word to say to your lordship touching the fleet and the payment of the sailors."

"Another time, sir, another time," replied Shaftesbury, shortly. "I have other business now."

Pepys turned away, muttering to himself: "Ay, ay, it's so with them all. Talk of money and they're deaf as a post."

Closely followed by his lanky brother, whose face showed the frightened awe he felt at being in this sacred place, he crossed the apartment and joined Buckhurst and his friends.

"Gentlemen all, your servant. My brother, John, who has come to seek his fortune at court. A clever lad, clever, though with scarce the polish I would wish."

Buckhurst smiled kindly at the blushing young man.

"With you as his champion, good master Pepys, he can scarce fail of success."

"You know all things, Master Pepys," broke in Sir Thomas Ogle. "We were just discussing who would be the next beauty to bask in the



sunshine of the royal pleasure. It is report that the king is sighing after Nell Gwynne."

"I tell you, it cannot be," ejaculated Buckhurst.

"As your lordship says, it is quite impossible," said Pepys quickly, with a vivid recollection of a previous conversation on the same subject. "No! No! take my word of it. The new ruler of the king's heart, and with it of all Britain, will be La Belle Stuart."

"I have heard some rumor of this."

"And rumor, as usual, speaks with a leaven of truth. His majesty is mad for Lady Frances, forever getting her into corners, and——"

He stopped abruptly, noticing that his brother was listening with round eyes and wide-open mouth.

"Further off, John," he commanded, with dignified tone and imposing manner. "We are on State matters."

The poor lad, abashed, shrank back.

"Speaking of angels," exclaimed Etherege, who was nearest the window, "here comes one who if not exactly in that category hopes to ally himself with the very one under discussion."

"The Duke of Richmond!" cried Buckhurst, looking over his friend's shoulder. "So, he has arrived at last. He expected to be here some days sooner."

The man approaching was a magnificent specimen of humanity. Of more than ordinary height, he carried himself with a marvellous combination of dignity and manly grace. His features were as regular and clear cut as those of an Apollo. He wore his own brown hair and in his dark eyes shone an expression of fearless truth and honesty, before which the wily court butterflies had more than once quailed. He had just arrived in town from Chatham with reports of the latest engagement of the Dutch. But it was not of the enemy he was thinking as he crossed the shady fragrant garden toward the open windows of the matted gallery. His heart was beating high with the joy of anticipation, for was he not shortly to meet once more the beacon star of his existence, the one woman of the world to him, his first love and his last. This was Whitehall, and after laying his flag at the feet of the gracious sovereign it was his delight to serve, a look, a word from the queen of his heart would repay him for all the dangers through which he had passed.

As Richmond entered the room where the courtiers and petitioners were waiting, a man detached himself from a group a short distance away and advanced toward where the Duke was receiving the greetings of Buckhurst and his companions. He was a strange looking indi-

vidual, gaunt and raw-boned, with a cadaverous complexion and deep-set restless eyes. The severe cut and sombre hue of his garments enhanced his sinister appearance.

“Welcome from sea, your Grace, laurels and all,” exclaimed Sir George.

“With never a willow among them,” added Ogle, with a low bow.

“I thank you, gentlemen,” replied Richmond, and there was an undercurrent of sadness in his voice. “No willow among them. I would that it were so. I fear, Sir Thomas, that you are disposed to be merry.”

“And why should he not be so? Has he not cause?” fell upon their ears in hollow, solemn tones. “The Dutch beating us at sea; the plague preparing to scourge us again on shore; and the King’s exchequer empty. Have we not all rare cause for merriment, my masters?”

“It’s that fifth monarchy man, Major Wilding,” muttered Ogle to Etherege.

“The scurvy knave!” replied Ogle. “Such disloyal villains should not be allowed at Whitehall.”

“Cause for merriment!” said Buckhurst lightly, turning to the new comer. “At least there’s some merit in being merry under the awful shadow of Major Wilding.”

“Each to his calling, my lord,” was the stern

response; "you thrust with your tongue, while I wear my wit here much at your service," and he laid his hand upon his sword.

"His Majesty is late," interposed Richmond to prevent a possible quarrel. "I long to behold his countenance again. Indeed," he added with that frankness which was his distinguishing characteristic, "there is but one countenance here that I more desire to see."

Etherege and Ogle exchanged significant glances.

"Your Grace, perhaps, may have a double pleasure," remarked the former. "You may see them together."

"That is not impossible," replied Richmond, simply, not at all understanding the meaning underlying Therege's words. "At all events, I am anxious to lay the Dutch flag I have at his Majesty's feet."

"Nay," said Ogle, "that should be laid at the feet of Britannia who figures on earth, as well as on the British half-pence as La Belle Stuart."

"The King has been a hoarder of half-pence ever since the coinage," laughed Therege. "It is an excellent device. It teaches him economy."

At this, the Duke could not fail to perceive what was being hinted at.

“Is this jesting, gentlemen?” he asked slowly.

“In regard to the ha’pence?” queried Ethelred. “Nay, it is the sober truth. See!” he drew into his pocket and drawing forth a coin. “By my faith, it is a miracle that I have one. Look, my lord, on one side, the head of his Majesty; may Heaven preserve him! And, on the other, the portrait of Lady Frances, with Britannia’s helmet and trident.”

“The only fault the king has to find with this die,” chuckled Pepys, who had been listening with rare enjoyment, as he always did when in question of another’s discomfiture, “the only fault that the king has to find with this die is that both faces are not on the same side.”

Richmond took the coin, and his face grew dark, yes, there was no doubt of those features. They were those of the woman he loved. As if it had been an adder, he flung the coin from him, far out into the garden. He started to speak, but as a sudden thought struck him, he paused.

This was done simply to chafe him, and he would not allow Lady Frances’ name to be defiled by a quarrel with these mischief-making popinjays.

Mastering his indignation, he turned abruptly away and walked over to the other side of the

apartment, where he stood moodily staring out into the street.

“How he winced!” exclaimed Ogle

“Every shot told!” added Etherege.

Buckhurst said nothing. He was thinking: “Poor fellow, I feel for him. Those tales about Nelly and the king are equally distasteful to me.”

Gloomy Major Wilding also was silent, but his thoughts were busy. He belonged to that faction, vastly in the minority to be sure, but still of respectable numbers, which had never become reconciled to the Restoration, and he was ever on the look-out for recruits to aid in the overthrow of the monarchy and the rehabilitation of the commonwealth. In fact, it was with that very purpose in view that he had come to Whitehall that morning. The Duke of Richmond’s name would be one to conjure with. Although his grace was known to be of unswerving loyalty, still, jealousy was a powerful passion. At all events, here was stuff to work upon.

Pepys, shadowed closely by his brother, who seemed afraid to be left by himself, slowly made his way over to where the duke stood.

“It is a duke, John,” he observed, in a low tone. “Observe how I accost him. It will be a lesson to you. My Lord Duke.”

Richmond started and turned from his absent contemplation of the scene without.

“May it please your grace,” proceeded Pepys, oilily, “to recall your humble servant to your memory.”

“I remember you well,” replied Richmond, courteously enough. “Master Samuel Pepys, I believe.”

“The same, your grace,” answered Samuel, with a gratified smirk. “I saw your grace at the Admiralty office, before the Rupert sailed, about the pay of the sailors. Sad, grumbling knaves, and with no consideration whatever. Why, would your grace believe it, no later than yesterday one of them lay dying, beneath our very office windows, of the scurvy!”

“While the money that should go for their food and medicine is lavished on these butterflies,” retorted Richmond bitterly, still smarting under the stabs he had received. “I never come to Whitehall, Master Pepys, that I do not long to shake the gold off those gentlemen’s coats into my poor fellows’ pockets.”

Politically Samuel saw that he was on the wrong track, so he hastened to change the subject. He saw an opportunity to obtain information; he had an insatiable craving to be the first to obtain scraps of news of every description, in order to retail them himself and jot them down

in his diary, for which latter act he certainly deserves the undying gratitude of an amused and instructed posterity. So, he asked :

“ But how about this late action, my lord ? Doubtless it was a victory, but I cannot hear of any prizes being taken.”

Richmond smiled sarcastically. He was in an ill temper, and it pleased him to give vent to it. Ordinarily, he would not have been so free of speech.

“ A victory ! Oh, yes ! ” he replied in an ironical tone. “ We have lost but fourteen ships.”

“ Mercy on me ! ” cried Pepys, throwing up his hands in real or affected dismay.

“ And seven run aground on the Galloper Sand,” continued Richmond, in the same satirical strain ; “ and the enemy has not chased us further than Chatham. So, past doubt it is a victory.”

“ Alack-a-day, and there'll be more ships to find and no money to pay for them. Still, it is a comfort we have a Dutch flag.”

“ Let us make the most of it, for the Dutch have some ten of ours in exchange.”

He paused, as the scenes he had recently witnessed rose up before his memory, scenes that were a disgrace to England and her navy, where the Dutch admiral, Van Tromp, dared to



sail up the Thames, with a broom at his mast-head, while vessels bearing the English flag fled before him, like chickens at the approach of a hawk ; where the so-called gentlemen captains with their ships, as in the case of Barkely and the Swiftsure, were never seen from the beginning of the fight until the last gun was fired.

The Duke sighed deeply as he remembered all this.

“ Ah, Master Pepys,” he said, bitterly, “ what can you expect of a fleet where the worst discredit is to have followed the sea from boyhood and the best title to promotion is the good word of a royal mistress.”

“ Hush ! Hush, your grace ! ” exclaimed Pepys, warningly.

But the caution came too late. The indiscreet speech had been overheard. Major Wilding stood at his side.

“ Such words sound strangely here, my lord duke,” said the fanatical republican, gravely, “ but I have seen the time when, even inside these walls, the honor of England had more such defenders as you. And,” he added, after a slight pause, approaching close to the duke, so that his words were audible to him alone, although Mr. Pepys strained his ears to catch their import, “ and that time will come again when you see a man at the head of this nation

instead of a courtier's puppet and a mistress's plaything."

Richmond started, and upreared his head haughtily.

"I forbid you, sir, to use such words to me," he exclaimed.

And with that he turned his back completely upon Wilding. The latter bowed and retired; but he was evidently not offended at this abrupt, almost insulting dismissal, for a mysterious smile played about his thin lips, as he moved away.

"Your Grace," began Pepys.

"Oh, pardon me," exclaimed Richmond, turning suddenly. "I had forgotten you for the moment."

"With your grace's permission," continued Pepys, "that was a dangerous speech of yours. Still," he added, slyly, for he was itching to give the duke a clearer understanding of the rumors anent Lady Frances Stuart and the king, and to see how he would bear the knowledge. "Still, those were fine days when gallant deeds of gentlemen won gentle looks from ladies. To-day our ladies think more of a man's leg in a coranto than of his hand in battle."

"Not all, Master Pepys," retorted the duke, loyally. "Thank heaven there is still, at least, one worthy to nerve a man's arm in battle, one

whom an English gentleman need not blush to live and die for."

"Well, I trust there may be," replied wily Samuel, hesitatingly; "but I should be hard put to it to name her; there's no telling anything about the women since Lady Bagot turned cruel and Lady Frances kind."

Richmond flushed a dark crimson. Lady Frances again! What did it mean that her revered name should be thus lightly on the tongue of every flutterer about the court. He would find out and at once.

Glancing at the younger Pepys, who had been standing silently by through all the preceding scene, he laid his hand upon the arm of the elder one and led him further into the embrasure of the window, while the newly fledged clergyman, for John Pepys had taken holy orders, gazed in bewildered admiration at the sight of his brother thus familiarly treated by a duke.

"Come, Master Pepys," began Richmond, as soon as they were out of hearing, "I have been twelve months away from court, as you know. What was this you were saying about—about Lady Bagot?"

Pepys smiled to himself, but his face was perfectly serious as he replied:

"It is said that she holds the Duke of York

at a distance, but it is not this that I wonder at the most. It is the other transformation."

"What other?"

"Nay, I hate tale-bearing," replied the old hypocrite, "but they do say that Lady Fran—"

But the duke's torturing curiosity was destined not to be satisfied for the present, at least, for at that moment the enormous folding doors at the extreme end of the gallery were thrown open, and a page announced in a loud voice:

"His Majesty, the King!"

Like a true courtier, Pepys with his brother trotting behind him, hurried away to pay his respects to his sovereign, while Richmond, sick at heart, and feeling that he must have a word with his lady-love, before he could meet the king, concealed himself behind the heavy curtains of the window.

All those who had been waiting more or less patiently pressed forward a little, each anxious for an opportunity to present his petition. Shaftesbury pushed aside his papers and rose to his feet.

Etherege glanced scornfully at a little group, who were evidently, from their dress and manner, of low degree.

"How good of his majesty to be thus accessible," he said, with a curl of the lip. "He is indeed the father of his people."

“The father of his people,” laughed Buckhurst, to whom the remark was addressed. “Well, yes, he is, of a good many of them, at all events.”

The king appeared, attended only by Will Chiffinch, his secretary, and half a dozen of those spaniels of which he was so fond and which ever since have borne his name.

The dogs ran here and there, yelping and snarling, causing annoyance to the entire company. One of them snapped at Buckhurst’s leg and carried away a piece of the silk hose in which the limb was encased.

“Did Tray bite you, my lord?” said Charles, suppressing a smile. “Poor little fellow. I trust he may survive it.”

Buckhurst was intensely irritated. There was little of the courtier about him, and with his usual bluntness, he did not hesitate to exhibit his sentiments, even in the presence of his sovereign.

“Hang the cur!” he exclaimed ruefully. “May Heaven bless your majesty, but may it damn your dogs!”

The airy monarch laughed good-humoredly, and, seating himself at Shaftesbury’s table, proceeded to give audience to the various petitioners, treating each with that easy familiarity and yet perfect courtesy which made him so

popular with all with whom he came in contact. In fact, he carried his politeness to an excess for he was perfectly accessible and would hear anything against anybody.

The vast majority of the cases were finally disposed of, the king, it must be confessed, making many promises which he would probably forget to keep.

Pepys, fancying his opportunity had come, advanced with a paper in his hand.

“Sire,” he began, obsequiously, “I bring for your Majesty’s approval a list of the reserve fleet.”

Charles hated attending to public business and shirked it whenever he could.

“Really, Master Pepys,” he said languidly, “I am not the Lord High Admiral. This is matter for His Grace of York, not for me.”

“Pardon me, your Majesty, but——”

“Well, well, leave the paper there and I will read it—when I have time.”

Pepys retired, discomfited, and was succeeded by Shaftesbury.

“The business of the day’s Council, your Majesty——”

“Odds fish, man,” interrupted the king impatiently, “shall I not hear the business of the council at the council?”

“Let us hope so, your Majesty,” replied

Shaftesbury, dryly; "these papers await your Majesty's signature. Shall I not read them to you?" he added, as the king took up the pen.

"What, is it not enough that I sign them for you?" retorted Charles, hastily inscribing his name at the foot of each paper. "Traitor, would you kill your king with overwork? There, Heaven be thanked, that's finished. Now, Buckhurst, it's your turn."

As he spoke, he pushed the papers aside, and, picking up one of the spaniels, began running his white, jewelled hand through its silken curls.

"I have nothing to ask, your Majesty," replied Buckhurst, "or, if I have, it shall come through other channels."

"Faith, you're considerate, and I will remember it when the time comes. Come oftener to court, my lord. By my life, I believe that you are the only one of my friends who does not keep a tame knave for whom he wants a favor. Well, Etherege, *you* desire a favor, I know from your face."

"Yes, your Majesty, I desire an order——"

"An order! Tilly-vally, man, I hate that worse than physic. Can not your order wait?"

Etherege turned away, but, as he did so, he said to Buckhurst, loud enough for the king to hear:

“Nay, then, Davenant will have his way.”

Charles pricked up his ears.

“What’s that?” he cried. “Davenant?”

“Yes, sire,” replied Etherege, “the Duke’s house will secure pretty Nelly.”

The king put down the dog with which he had been toying, and, for the first time, his lazy expression gave place to one of interest.

“Nelly!” he exclaimed, vivaciously. “But she’s hired at the other house with Killigrew.”

“Yes, your Majesty, but Sir William outbids him four-score pounds, and, though Nelly be loyal, yet money being everywhere scarce——”

The king was now thoroughly roused and full of animation.

“Zounds! these are grave matters, indeed, Sir George. What! Rob the king’s playhouse, and of its prettiest wench. Tempt Nelly from her allegiance—this must be looked to. Chiffinch, send a messenger to bid Davenant and Killigrew come to us at once in our private closet. Oh! and Chiffinch!”

Chiffinch approached close to the table.

“Do not forget, Chiffinch,” was the whispered injunction, “to deliver that note at once into Lady Frances’ own hands.”

“You can rely upon it, your Majesty.”

The king rose and whistled the dogs to follow him.



“Carry off our Nell Gwynne! No, indeed, we cannot do without Nelly!” And with a brief “good-morrow, gentlemen,” he hurried from the room.

Buckhurst watched him with frowning brows and compressed lips. The king’s words and manner had confirmed his worst suspicions. Desperate measures were imperative, or Nelly was lost to him forever.

“Carry off Nelly!” he thought, darkly. “So, you cannot do without Nelly! But you shall, though, if I have to carry her off myself by force. Ah! Why not! Etherege and Ogle will stand by me, I am sure.”

He was interrupted in his reflections by the entrance through the window near which he was standing of a woman who was a vision of stately loveliness. Her features were as regular as those of a Greek statue, her hair was of an exquisite golden hue, and her eyes, large and liquid as those of the ox-eyed Juno, were of that peculiar shade, between turquoise and sapphire, to be found only in the cornflower. In her whole manner and bearing, there was that indescribable something which proclaimed her one highly born and highly bred.

With a courteous salutation, she passed the little group of gentlemen and crossed the gal-

lery on her way to the queen's apartments. Just as she was opposite the window where Richmond was concealed the curtains parted and the duke appeared before her.

“Frances!”

“Richmond!”

She paused, her eyes fixed upon his face. The rich color dyed her fair cheeks and then faded away, leaving her pale as marble. She made a movement as if to throw herself into his arms, and then drew back, suddenly remembering that they were not alone.

“How the sight of her noble face strikes scandal dumb,” thought Richmond, as he eagerly drank in the beauty of this one peerless woman, who, through so many weary months of separation, had been the guiding star of his existence.

But before he could speak, to his bitter annoyance they were joined by all the others in the room, Pepys and his brother, Shaftesbury, Buckhurst, Ogle and Etherege, all eager to bask in the sunshine of the favor of her whom rumor declared to be the new divinity of their royal master.

Pepys was the first to address her.

“Madam, may it please you to allow me to present to your ladyship my brother John, for whom I would crave your countenance.”

"Your servant, sir," said Lady Frances, coldly. Why did these people weary her at such a time as this?

"And for myself——"

"By your leave, Master Secretary," interrupted Shaftesbury, gently but firmly pushing him aside. "Fair Lady Frances, you are often alone with the King, and here is a paper I would fain lay before his majesty."

"Methinks, my lord, as president of the Council, your own hand were the more fitting channel."

"Alas, madam, business never reaches the royal ear, save in the disguise of pleasure."

"More shame, then, for councillors who stoop so to disguise it," replied Lady Frances with bitter scorn.

Shaftesbury colored and retired. He felt, despite himself, that the rebuke was deserved.

"May I recall myself to Lady Frances' memory?" said Buckhurst, with an effort. The part he was playing was hateful to him, but he believed it to be the only way to obtain his desire.

"Lord Buckhurst is not easily forgotten," replied Lady Frances, more graciously than she had spoken to the other two.

"Madam, I have a suit to the king." Lady

Frances made an impatient movement. "It is for a ship."

"Why appeal to me? Surely the Lord High Admiral——"

"What is the Duke of York's pennant to Lady Frances Stuart's petticoat?" interposed Buckhurst. He did not mean to be discourteous, but the inference to be drawn from his remark was unmistakable.

The lady upreared her handsome head, and there was a steely glitter in her blue eye, as she responded haughtily :

"My lord, Frances Stuart has no such power as you suppose; but if she had, she would put it to a better use than to recommend for command one who has not won the right to have it."

Buckhurst said no more, but Ogle, who should have been warned by his friend's fate, ventured to urge his petition.

"Lady Frances, I crave——"

But Lady Frances' patience was exhausted. She had noticed the gathering clouds on Richmond's face and knew well the cause. The homage paid to her was, moreover, excessively distasteful to her, and she determined to put an end to it.

"Your pardon, Sir Thomas Ogle," she said, firmly, "any words would be useless. More-

over, gentlemen, once for all, I have no influence with his majesty and it is not to me that you should appeal."

As she spoke she turned away from them and was about to address Richmond, but she was doomed once more to interruption, for Chiffinch had entered the gallery, and seeing Lady Frances there, hastened toward her.

"Your pardon, madam, one moment," he said, handing her a folded slip of paper. "From the king."

Richmond started, and from his eye shot a fierce and dangerous gleam.

Lady Frances opened the note and read as follows:

*"I must see you and alone. CHARLES."*

As she took in the meaning of the words, a bitter anger filled her breast. Was this persecution of the king's never to cease, and how doubly hard it was that on this day of all others she was forced to endure it. What would Richmond think? Richmond, her hero, beside whom all other men were to her like shadows. Forcing herself to be calm, she thrust the note in an embroidered bag she wore by her side and said quietly to Chiffinch:

"'Tis well, sir. There is no answer."

"Very well, madam. Gentlemen," advancing to Buckhurst and the others, "his majesty

invites you to the tennis yard. His grace of Buckingham has challenged Sir Charles Sedley to six sets and the games will be played immediately."

They trooped noisily away out into the garden in the direction of the tennis-court.

The long-separated lovers were alone for the first time. Lady Frances turned eagerly toward the duke, but his arms were folded and his face sternly averted.

"Richmond!" she murmured, softly.

"Madam," was the grave response.

Her heart grew heavy within her. Was this the meeting she had looked forward to with such joyful anticipation? "Madam," she echoed in sorrowful reproach.

At this the duke turned, and as his eyes met hers, his expression involuntarily softened.

"Pardon me," he said, "I am quick to catch the tone of the court. There was a time when I would have used less ceremony, but that was when Frances Stuart boasted a scantier train of followers."

"Richmond!" she exclaimed, indignantly, and then with a sudden revulsion of feeling: "But, no, no, I cannot be angry with you. I see how it is. You have been listening to the evil tongues that wag only too freely in this

place. Oh! Richmond, Richmond, was not your trust proof against scandal?"

"Tongues! Scandal!" he retorted, bitterly. "It is what my own eyes have seen, my own ears have heard—this cringing before you of the court, this note from the king. How am I to reconcile such things with the fair fame of Frances Stuart?"

"Frances Stuart is a woman," she cried, her eyes flashing and two crimson spots burning upon her cheeks; "how can she protect herself against these profligate foplings? Heaven help me!" striking her hands passionately together. "I wear no sword. There was a time when I believed I might trust the defence of my good name to yours."

Richmond groaned.

"If I could but know——"

"If you could but know! For shame, my Lord of Richmond. You, of all men, should know what I have been and am. I will not stoop to clear myself with protestations. I will but look you in the face—thus, and say to you: I am worthy of an honest man's love. Do you believe me? I will be trusted or I will be nothing to you. Do you trust me?"

He gave one long look into those fearless eyes and his doubts shrank away. His face cleared as if by magic.

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“Yes,” he cried; “I believe you.”

But even as he opened his arms to fold her to his breast; he saw her expression change. She was looking beyond him, through the open window into the garden.

“What is it?” he asked in surprise.

“The King,” she exclaimed, nervously. “He is coming this way. Go! go!”

His relief had been but short-lived after all. In an instant his suspicion returned with redoubled strength. He turned and saw his majesty approaching through the shrubbery, unattended and evidently coming to the gallery. So that note was a rendezvous! Well, the king would find a third at the interview.

“Go! go!” reiterated Lady Frances, beseechingly. “For your sake, for my sake, he must not find you here.”

“I will wait. The king owes *me* a hearing,” he declared, coldly.

“So be it, then. Remain!” she replied in tones every whit as frigid as his own.

When the king entered the gallery he did not at first perceive Richmond, who was partially hidden by the window curtains. He thought Lady Frances was alone, and he exclaimed joyfully:

“Ah! my fair Britannia——”



But he stopped abruptly as the duke advanced and knelt at his feet.

Charles' natural good humor rarely deserted him, save when he was interrupted or crossed in a love affair. On such occasions he was capable of harshness, even cruelty.

"How now!" he exclaimed angrily. "Whom have we here? Oh! my lord of Richmond, I believe." And he cast a quick, suspicious glance first at the kneeling form of the duke and then at Lady Frances, who could not entirely conceal her emotion. "What do you here, my lord duke?"

"I am just from the fleet, your majesty, with despatches and a flag from Sir Edward Spragge."

"Sdeath, my lord," broke out the king roughly; "you are a better captain than courtier or you would know that audiences are asked, not taken as highwaymen take purses."

Richmond rose to his feet, his face scarlet with passion.

"Your majesty teaches me a subject's duty," he muttered in a thick voice.

"And you, Lady Frances," continued the king, who was so consumed with jealous rage that he forgot his customary courtesy, "the queen requires your presence, and immediately."

Then without another word he turned abruptly and passed out into the garden.

Lady Frances cast one long, sorrowful glance at Richmond.

“You would better have trusted her who loved you,” she said in a low, trembling voice.

Richmond would have spoken, but she waved him aside, and with head erect and stately step swept across the gallery and disappeared in the direction of the Queen’s apartments.

## CHAPTER IV.

### PRETTY, MAD NELLY.

**I**T was after the play, and Nell Gwynne was returning, in a hired coach, to her modest lodgings in Petticoat Lane. She had been acting in tragedy, which was but little to her liking, or for that matter, to that of her audience. In his immortal diary, Master Pepys says of her appearance as Cydaria in *The Indian Emperor*: "To the King's playhouse, where I find Nell Gwynne come again, which I am glad of; but I was most infinitely displeased with her being put to act the Emperor's daughter, which she does most basely."

Although honest Samuel was a most unreliable critic so far as tragedy was concerned, which, as he himself confesses he did most incontinently detest, he was probably right in this case. For Nelly's arch, merry expression, eyes sparkling with fun, cheeks ever ready to dimple into smiles, and laughter-provoking mouth, were qualifications meet for the Comic Muse, while her capabilities were utterly unsuited to the de-

mands of Melpomene. Heroics, indeed! Neither her face, voice, natural gifts, training nor inclinations fitted her for the sorrows and passions of the lofty heroines of the stilted tragedies of the day. But in comedy she was unapproachable. In gay, madcap parts Pepys pronounces her beyond all imitation. "Lord, her confidence!" he says, speaking of her representation of a young gallant. "I can never hope to see the like done again by man or woman."

The performance to-night had consisted of a new tragedy called *Tyrannic Love* or *The Royal Martyr*, in which Nell played the part of Valeria, the daughter of Maximin, tyrant of Rome. The play was founded upon the story of the martyrdom of Saint Catharine, a saint much in vogue just then, in compliment to the queen, Catharine of Braganza. The audience yawned through the dull acts, but, in truth, they were no more bored than the fair heroine herself in her endeavors to simulate the griefs of a rôle entirely unsympathetic to her nature. Because it was Nell Gwynne, however, the public endured her with the best grace it could, while a less popular actress would probably have been hooted off the stage.

In the last act, before the weapon can be wrested from her, Valeria stabs herself twice. As the dead body of the princess was about to

be carried from the stage, Nell commanded the bearers to stop and set her upon her feet. Then, to the open-mouthed wonder of boxes, pit and galleries, she advanced and, descending from the stilts she managed so awkwardly, she recited, with all her old laughing grace, the following epilogue :

“ I come, kind gentlemen, strange news to tell ye,  
 I am the ghost of poor departed Nelly.  
 Sweet ladies, be not frightened; I'll be civil  
 In what I was, a little, harmless devil.  
 To tell you true, I walk because I die  
 Out of my calling, in a tragedy.  
 Oh, poet ! damned dull poet, who could prove  
 So senseless to make Nelly die for love !  
 As for my epitaph, when I am gone  
 I'll trust no poet, but will write my own :  
 ' Here Nelly lies. Although she lived a slattern,  
 Yet died a princess, acting in St. Cath'rin.' ”

At this innovation—bold, to say the least of it—the house roared with laughter and applause, and the audience went home in high good humor, fully forgiving the daring actress for all her shortcomings in parts out of her line, and holding her higher in favor than ever.

But it was not of the stage, its failures or its triumphs, that Nelly was thinking as the carriage jolted over the wretched pavements. It was of a pair of tender eyes, of a soft voice which had murmured that very evening its amorous pleadings in her ear. Ah ! Nell, for

all your jests and jibes at the tender passion, the slighted love-god has taken sweet revenge at last. You are caught fast in his net and his arrow has pierced deeply your hitherto impregnable heart.

To do the young actress justice, that her lover sat upon a throne had little, if any, weight with her. It was the man himself she cared for, not his rank and power.

All at once, she was roused from her reflections by the sudden stoppage of the coach, and then the sound of an angry altercation fell upon her ears. Hastily opening the door, she descended, and by the faint light of a swinging street-lamp saw her coachman and another, whose vehicle was drawn up close by, engaged in a lusty bout of fisticuffs.

“Stop!” cried Nell. “Stop, at once!”

At the ringing command the two Jehus paused and fell apart.

“Come here, William,” ordered Nell.

The man obeyed, holding his hand to one eye, which was more or less damaged. Although he was not her own coachman, he was well known among his fellows as the one who invariably drove the actress.

“What does all this mean?”

“The knave drove into me, and, when I cursed him, he said——”

“ Well? ”

The man hesitated and stammered :

“ I do not like to tell you, madam. ”

“ Rubbish, man! What did he say? Out with it! ”

“ He—he said that he drove for a countess, while I drove for a jade. ”

Nell was silent a moment, and then she laughed outright, but there was a note in her laughter that somehow sounded forced.

“ Go to, my good William, ” she said, lightly, “ and never risk your carcass again, save in defence of the truth. Mount your box, and let us proceed. ”

But Nell was not destined to reach home that night without further adventure. The coach was within a stone's throw of her lodgings when it was again arrested, and again a scuffle took place. • But this time there were six men instead of one to fight, and the coachman was quickly overpowered.

The door of the carriage was flung open and a villainous looking head was thrust in. Nelly, believing herself attacked by highwaymen, essayed to shriek, but the sound was stifled by a heavy hand clapped over her mouth. Her head and arms were then muffled in a thick cloak, and she felt herself lifted and carried along by a pair of strong arms. How far or in what direction

she went she could not tell, but after a lapse of time, which seemed to her interminable, she realized that she was being carried up a flight of stairs; then she was seated in a chair, and the cloak, which was half suffocating her, was unfastened.

Freeing her hands, she tore it off, and, gasping for breath, she looked about her with eyes dazzled by the sudden light.

She found herself alone in a handsomely-furnished apartment. Wax candles burned brightly in candelabra upon the mantel and upon a table set for two with a rich display of glass and chinaware. Nell collected her scattered thoughts and endeavored to pierce the mystery. She liked a jest well enough, but this was past a jest, and she would make the perpetrator smart for it. An abduction, evidently, but who was the offender? Oh, that he were there, that she could scratch his eyes out! But who could it be? Etherege? No; he had too much sense. Harry Jermyn? No; he had too much conceit to think force necessary. Tom Ogle? No; he was too poor; he hadn't a groat to pay the bullies with. Another name occurred to her, the thought of which flushed her pretty cheek crimson. "Come, come, Nelly, no nonsense," she said to herself, hastily rising; "that way madness lies, as the poet says."



She hurried over to the table and scrutinized the napery and the china. No crest! no initial letter! Nothing to guide her there. Hang it! She could not work herself up into a proper rage until she knew who her abductor was. It might be some one whom she liked. But where was he? One thing was clear, he certainly ought to be here. Why, the man must be a fool to carry a woman off by violence, and then, like Macbeth in the play, "proceed no further in this business." Oh! there was a door leading to another apartment. She would investigate. Cautiously crossing the room, she drew aside the curtain and peeped in. Yes, there was some one there. Tarquin, undoubtedly. He was sitting at a table busily writing. His back was toward her, and all she could see was that he was well dressed and wore a flowing periwig; but so did every other gentleman of quality in those days. Who could it be? It was scarcely courteous, to say the least, to carry off a play-actress, and then turn his back upon her and pen away for dear life.

She dropped the curtain and reflected on what she should do. She was consumed with curiosity, and she could not wait for matters to develop themselves. Should she burst in upon him and abuse him? But how? In Billingsgate or in the vein of the injured tragedy queen? Pshaw!

there was no sport in either, and if there was one thing that her wilful, gay butterfly nature did adore, it was sport—sport in season and out of season; and yet, with all her fun-loving spirit, she was never malicious. Her heart was too tender to harm any living thing.

How should she induce this fox to break cover? What rôle would it be best to assume? Virtuous despair! Yes, that would be the best jest of all, and she tittered at the very thought. But how to unearth him? She could not go to him and say: “Come, sir, and offend my ears with your indiscreet proposals.” Should you cough him out? No, that was old and trite. She had done that eleven thousand times upon the stage. Virtuous despair!

Ah! she would sob him out.

And suiting the action to the thought, she threw herself down in a chair, and, covering her face with her hands, began to sob and moan in an exaggerated assumption of grief.

The stratagem was successful, for in less than two minutes the curtain was raised, and the man she had seen writing at the desk appeared.

Nell peeped between her fingers.

“Why, bless my life,” she murmured to herself as she caught sight of the new-comer’s

face, "if it isn't that solemn toad, Sam Pepys. Oh! oh!"

And her pretty shoulders shook in a silent convulsion of laughter, which Pepys mistook for a sign of distress.

He approached her cautiously and wonderingly.

"It grieves me greatly," he began, "to see——"

But he broke off short in amazement, for the hands were removed and to his eyes was revealed the roguish face of Nell Gwynne.

"Why, it's pretty, mad Nelly," he stammered.

To tell the truth he was no more astounded than Nell herself. She had never given the politic secretary courage to carry out so high-handed a proceeding as an abduction in the public streets. But he should pay dearly for his presumption.

She rose, and, facing him with the sternest expression she could assume, said to him gravely :

"Samuel Pepys, you old sinner! I'll tell your wife!"

At this to him most terrible of all threats, although for the life of him he could not imagine what she was going to tell, Pepys changed color visibly.

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"Tell my wife!" he ejaculated. "Now Heaven forbid! But pray, Mistress Gwynne, what is the matter? What have I done?"

"Done!" retorted Nell, with no relaxation of the accusing solemnity of her manner. "Done! What haven't you done. The matter is that I'll expose you to the town for a sheep-faced knave."

Knave! Poor Pepys' heart shivered with fear. What had this mischievous jade discovered? Was it the matter of the victualing of the ships or the plate from Master Bowen, or, worse than all, had she got wind of his last escapade with Mistress Knipp of the Duke's?

"Nay, Mistress Gwynne," he began hastily, and then, relapsing into a wheedling tone:

"Nelly, pretty Nelly, some one has vexed you and so you fall foul of your friends; sure we are fast friends."

"Private friendship must give way to public morality," retorted Nell, with all the rigid austerity of a mother abbess lecturing a novice.

"You would not be so cruel."

"I'll tell all the world and your wife unless you instantly conduct me back to my lodgings."

"With pleasure, sweet Nelly, with great pleasure," he responded with an alacrity in-

spired by fear of her vague, and so doubly alarming, threat.

He tried the door but it refused to open.

“Why, this door is locked.”

“As if you did not know it! Innocent soul!” snapped Nelly sarcastically.

“Indeed,” replied Samuel, earnestly, “it was not locked when I entered.”

“You have the key of your own door, I suppose.”

“Yes, but this is not my door.”

It was now Nell’s turn to be astonished.

“Not your door! Whose is it, then?”

“Whose should it be but my Lord Buckhurst’s?”

Nell started and a faint smile appeared at the corners of her rosy mouth. So she had misjudged the honest Samuel, and Buckhurst was the offender. She was not sorry for it. Here was a chance for rare fun. She liked Buckhurst, but she would lead him a pretty dance before she had finished with him, and make him smart well for his temerity.

“I came to see my lord on a matter concerning the fleet, and while waiting for him to return I ventured to enter his study to make some notes in my diary, and— The Lord preserve us,” suddenly interrupting himself, his countenance exhibiting every sign of alarm.

“He will return shortly, and if he finds me alone with you, what will happen? He is a dare-devil, and he said once that if he caught me again in your tiring room he would slit my ears.”

Even as he spoke a step was heard on the landing outside and a voice exclaimed :

“She is here, you say?”

Pepys, in great alarm, turned to flee, but Nell caught him by his voluminous coat-tails.

“Let me go,” pleaded poor Samuel, struggling to release himself.

But Nell only held on the tighter.

“Oh, sir,” she begged, assuming an air of the most poignant distress, “do not desert me, I implore. Do not leave me alone with this vile abductor.”

“Nay, he won’t hurt you.”

“Oh, protect me! protect me!” And the mischievous lass attempted to throw her arms about his neck.

But Pepys’ ears had caught the sound of a key turning in the lock, and, in a fever of alarm, he started back. As he did so Nell’s flowing sleeve caught in his wig, and off it came, leaving him as bald as a tennis ball.

Not waiting to recover his property, he dashed into the next room, the tails of his coat spread

out behind him like the pennant of a ship in a strong gale.

Choking with merriment, Nell thrust the wig in her pocket. As she did so her eye fell upon a black bound book which had fallen upon the carpet. She picked it up, and without the slightest compunction opened it. As she read a word or two she smiled wickedly, and hastily tore out half a dozen leaves at random.

Pepys's bald cranium appeared between the curtains.

"Nelly," he called in a cautious whisper, "Nelly, my journal book; I've lost my journal book."

"Here it is," tossing it to him, "minus a few pages," she added, *sotto voce*, "which I'll peruse at my leisure."

The creaking of the opening door startled her, and flinging herself down in a chair, she buried her face in her hands.

She was not a moment too soon. Indeed, if Buckhurst had not found some difficulty with the lock Pepys would have been discovered, and her own contemplated bit of acting spoiled.

It was something of an unpleasant shock to Buckhurst to find the disconsolate figure huddled up in the arm chair, sobbing as if its heart would break. He was prepared for reproaches, sarcasm—anything, in fact, but tears. He was

half ashamed of what he had done; but pshaw! it was only a long and a tragical protestation, and he was sure to be forgiven.

Approaching the fair weeper, he knelt down by her side.

“Nelly,” he began, coaxingly, “forgive me. Love, too hot to be quenched by reason, fired me to the act. But I kneel at your feet a true penitent, and never will I rise till I hear you say that you forgive the boldness of my passion.”

He paused. No answer save a burst of sobs twice as violent as before. He was in consternation. Surely this could not be merry Nell Gwynne; it was a Niobe, all tears. Although Nell failed to depict sorrow upon the stage, she could counterfeit it admirably in private, and Buckhurst was completely deceived.

“Nay, sweet soul, be comforted,” he murmured. “Although you entered here a prisoner, you shall remain a queen. I live but to obey your lightest words.”

But her affliction was apparently not to be assuaged. Her whole frame shook with the boisterousness of her anguish.

“Sullen little devil!” he thought. “This is not what I bargained for.”

At this moment a discreet knock at the door startled him, and leaping to his feet he called out:



“Come in!”

A servant appeared.

“Well, what is it?”

“My lord——” began the servant, hesitating.

“Well, rascal, what now?”

“My lord, the—the servants who came with—with this lady—— The fact is, my lord, they are in the hall, and they will not go until——”

“Oh, I see,” said Buckhurst, helping the man out in his embarrassment, “until they are paid for their dirty work.”

The servant made a sign in the affirmative.

Was the sound that came from behind the screen of the lady’s hands a manifestation of grief or of amusement? As we are somewhat behind the scenes, we may decide that it was the latter.

“Tell the knaves that they shall be paid tomorrow,” said Buckhurst, in a low voice:

“I have, my lord, but they say that they never risk their necks on credit.”

Buckhurst thrust his hands hurriedly into his pockets, and as hurriedly withdrew them empty. He had played with the Count de Grammont the night before and lost every penny in his possession.

The situation was becoming decidedly awk-

ward, when Nell removed her hands and displayed a demure face, which to Buckhurst's astonishment revealed not the least trace of a tear.

"Prithee, sir, come hither an instant," she said softly to the servant.

The man obeyed.

"How much do the ruffians demand?" And she heaved a deep sigh.

"Two Jacobuses each, and there are six of them, madam."

"What!" cried Nell, with sudden energy. "Twelve Jacobuses for carrying off an actress! It's outrageous, monstrous, rank extortion!"

"So I said to them, madam, but my lord promised."

"Oh!" with another sigh, this time one of resignation, "if my lord promised I suppose that his promise must be kept."

And drawing out a well-filled purse she counted out the twelve coins. The servant's eyes opened wide; it was a long time since he had seen so much money beneath that roof.

When the man had disappeared Nell turned a severe look on his abashed lordship.

"It was too dear," she murmured, "sadly too dear. Really you ought to manage these things better. Am I always to pay for every entertainment it may be your pleasure to offer me?"

“Really, I——”

“Now stop and listen to me. The next time you desire to carry off a lady it will be much the cheapest way to consult her in the first place. Don't let her cost you twelve Jacobuses, for ten to one she won't be worth them, and, even if she is, she won't like to have to pay them herself. You see——”

But the fun-loving witch could continue this strain no longer. The whimsicality of the affair overcame her, and she broke out into a burst of laughter so rippling, so musical, so infectious, that Buckhurst, much relieved, joined gleefully in.

“Ha! ha! ha! you are a woman after my own heart. Merry Nelly, I adore you; ha! ha! ha!”

“And I like you. I ought to, I'm sure, for you cost me dear enough.”

Peace thus restored, Buckhurst found little difficulty in persuading his fair enslaver to remain to supper, although she insisted that immediately afterward she must return to her lodgings.

“But first,” urged Buckhurst, “you must swear to be mine, mine alone and mine forever.”

“Indeed, that I will not,” asseverated Nell, stoutly.

“Why not?”

“Because, you wretched deceiver, you have

been telling the same tale to every laced petticoat in Drury Lane."

"Of course I have," acknowledged Buckhurst, "but henceforth I renounce them all and am the devoted slave of one alone."

Nell cast up her eyes and breathed a tender sigh.

"Is this true?"

"Upon my soul, it is. Here I swear eternal fidelity to your bright eyes."

"Oh, my lord, such nobleness fills me with gratitude, and I will not be behind you in self-sacrifice. From this time forth I renounce little Jermyn, Hart, Harry Sidney, Tom Ogle, Lacy, Betterton and," demurely—"yes, I think that's all, and, like you, will devote myself to one."

"Swear it then, as I did," cried Buckhurst, eagerly.

She slyly drew Pepys' wig from her pocket and secretly attached it to her wrist.

"Swear," reiterated Buckhurst.

"I swear!" she exclaimed melodramatically, raising her hand to Heaven. The voluminous mass of curled hair waved to and fro in the air.

Buckhurst's face fell. Would she never be done with her tricks?

"What's that?" he demanded savagely.

Nell followed the direction of his eyes with the most innocent air in the world.

“Oh, Lud!” she cried, with a most admirable assumption of vernal ingenuousness. “Why, it’s like those things you men wear on your heads. Is it yours?”

“Mine? you crocodile!” retorted Buckhurst, out of all patience. “No, it is not mine. But the man who owns it is here; he must be here.”

“Here! Why, where can he be?” And she maliciously fixed her eyes upon the curtain which covered the door leading to the study.

Buckhurst observed the gaze and turned in its direction.

“Oh, don’t go there!” cried Nell, in affected alarm. “Indeed, I am not looking there. See, I am looking in every other direction.”

But Buckhurst strode into the study and in another moment returned, leading by the ear the shame-faced and frightened Samuel.

“Why, what do you call this?” cried Buckhurst.

“The head of a goose,” laughed Nell. “And now,” clapping the wig upon the bald pate, “it is the head of a wise man.”

“My lord, appearances are against me,” faltered Pepys. “I vow I came here to see your lordship, and——”

“And I vow you made love to me in his absence,” interrupted Nell. “Why, I adore him,

your lordship, my own solid, sanctimonious, smug-faced Samuel. Why, he comes almost every night to my dressing room, lends me pins and watches all my metamorphoses. My tiring wench calls him the scene-shifter. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Believe her not, your lordship," asseverated Pepys, in dismay. "She is a madcap, and her tongue runs away with her. It's all scandal, pure scandal!"

He would have protested further, but Buckhurst checked him with a good-humored gesture. He knew full well that he had no reason to be jealous of the solemn and plain-faced secretary.

"Mr. Pepys, forgive my heat," he said, pleasantly. "I meant nothing by it."

"And he must sup with us," insisted Nell.

"Certainly," Buckhurst agreed, but, it must be confessed, with no very good grace. "What, ho, without there! Supper! Supper!"

It was not supper, however, that appeared, but a servant announcing that two gentlemen desired to speak to his lordship immediately.

"Tell them I'm engaged and cannot see them," said Buckhurst.

"But they will not be denied, your lordship," and, coming close to his master, the servant whispered a word or two in his ear;

"Hang it," muttered Buckhurst, "I shall have to see them, I suppose, to quiet their clamor. Surely, my custom should be sufficient for these knavish tradesmen. But I shall not be long, Nelly."

"Oh! don't hurry yourself," retorted Nell, cheerfully. "I am sure I shall enjoy myself hugely with my beloved Samuel here. By the way, my lord, I have more Jacobuses, if you need them."

"Oh, the devil take your Jacobuses!" retorted Buckhurst, gruffly, as he flung out of the room.

"Oh, Nell, Nell," began Pepys, reproachfully, when they were alone, "how could you say such things, when you know that I come to your dressing room only to see if Knipp be there."

"Excessively flattering to me, I'm sure," replied Nell, sweeping him a mocking courtesy.

"Nay, nay, my child, I meant not that. But suppose my lord had taken you seriously. He is a terrible fellow, this Buckhurst. Heaven preserve us!" with a shudder, "suppose that he *had* slit my ears."

"That would have been no great harm. They are too long as they are. Besides, it would have prevented your learning things that were not intended for your hearing. A

very bad habit, Master Secretary, that of listening at keyholes."

Nell, though only in jest, had hit the nail on the head. More than one of those bits of information, which gossip-loving Pepys delighted to pick up, had been obtained in the reprehensible manner to which she alluded. Nell was a thorn in the good man's flesh. He rarely met the madcap actress that she did not alarm him by a knowledge, sometimes real, sometimes feigned, of the peccadilloes which it was the aim of his life to conceal from his wife, who was something of a virago, and of whom he stood in great awe.

"Keyholes!" he cried in a tone of virtuous indignation. "I do not comprehend you, Mistress Gwynne. I——"

But, before he could proceed further, the door behind him was hurriedly opened, and a woman, cloaked and masked, was pushed forcibly into the room.

Both Nell and Pepys cried out in surprise.

The woman tore off her mask and exhibited a coarse, flushed, ugly face, surmounted by a disorderly mass of wiry, carrotty hair.

"Why, it's Orange Moll!"

"Why, it's Nell!"

The two exclamations were simultaneous and of equal surprise.



"Why, Moll, what brings you here?" asked Nell, as soon as she had recovered from her surprise at the unexpected apparition.

"That's what I would like to know myself!" replied Moll, in a harsh, shrill voice. "Fine doings, indeed, when a respectable woman cannot go about her business in the public streets without being attacked by a gang of desperadoes and carried off no one knows where. But where am I?"

"In my Lord Buckhurst's house."

Moll grinned from ear to ear.

"Buckhurst! Lord, my dear, perhaps I was brought here at his orders."

The idea of Buckhurst abducting Orange Moll was almost too much for Nell's gravity, while Pepys chuckled audibly to his great misfortune, for Moll instantly turned upon him like a wild-cat.

"What are you snickering at, you moon-faced loon?" she shrieked. Her temper was none of the best, and she never sought to control the acerbity of her tongue. "Don't judge all men by yourself! By my virtue there are men who have better taste than to admire skeletons with hatchet-faces like that Knipp about whose petticoats you are always hanging! Oh, I know you, MasterPepys. I know you, and——"

“There, there, Moll,” interposed Nell, soothingly. “Master Pepys meant no harm, I’ll be bound.”

Moll allowed herself to be mollified. In her weather-beaten heart there was a very soft spot for the pretty actress, for many a kindness had she received at Nelly’s generous hands. After her graduation from the ranks of the orange girls, among whom, the prettiest and the blithest of all, she had stood in the front of the pit, with her vine-leaved covered basket of fruit, to the boards themselves, Nell never forgot her old companions, but was ever ready to aid and encourage them with kind words and to lavish upon them in time of sickness or need the entire store of her purse.

“We are both in the same boat, Moll,” she said when the orange woman’s sudden burst of temper was allayed. “I was brought here against my will, too.”

“What in the world can he want of both of us?” ejaculated Moll. “But never fear, my pretty, I am here, and I can defend us both.”

And indeed, with her strapping figure and muscular arms, she probably could have done so on an emergency.

As Nell, giving up the effort to solve the mystery of Moll’s appearance, gazed at her ugly countenance, a sudden thought came to her

which caused her bright eyes to dance and the dimples to come and go in her rosy cheeks.

“Oh, Moll,” she exclaimed, enthusiastically, “I have such an idea, oh, such a capital idea! Will you do me a favor? *Dear Moll*, will you?”

“Bless the child’s innocent heart,” was the fervid response, “of course I will. Can Nell Gwynne ask anything of Orange Moll that Orange Moll won’t do! What is it, my dear? Some trick, I’ll be bound!”

“Yes, but there is no time to be lost. Tarquin—I mean my lord Buckhurst—may be back at any moment.”

As she spoke she snatched up her cloak from where it had fallen on the floor and draped it over an arm chair with a high, carved back.

“Now, sit down here and put on your mask.” She hustled Moll into the chair and handed her the vizard.

“There he is! I hear him outside. Now, never mind what he says, don’t speak a word. I will do all the talking.”

And she slipped behind the chair where the folds of the cloak concealed her slender figure, but where, through the interstices of the carving, she could see everything.

When Buckhurst returned, after satisfying with glib promises the demands of his creditors,

he found Nell, as he supposed, masked and mantled, seated near the fire, while Pepys, with a look of bewilderment on his round face, was standing on the other side of the fireplace.

"Sulking again," he thought. "Hang her! She's never alike two minutes at a time."

And indeed she never was. Like Cleopatra, she was a woman of infinite variety, and perhaps that was the chief of her many charms.

"Why, Nelly," said Buckhurst, approaching the big chair, "what is the matter? Is this another of your jokes?"

"No, Harry," murmured a faint voice, "I am cold. I am ill."

"Cold? Ill? Let me give you a glass of wine. It will do you good."

The head nodded, rather energetically for a sick girl.

Buckhurst poured out a glass of claret and handed it to her. She raised it to her lips and drained it at a gulp.

"More!"

Again the operation was repeated.

"Does that revive you?" asked Buckhurst, tenderly.

"Yes, I think it does. I'll take another."

This somewhat staggered Buckhurst, for Nell was well known to be exceedingly abstemious. However, he complied with her request, and

then, drawing up a chair, sat down beside her and attempted to take her hand. She repulsed him, however, somewhat roughly, keeping her hands obstinately hidden in the folds of her cloak.

“Nelly,” he murmured, in his most persuasive accents, “remove your mask and let me bask in the light of your loveliness.”

“What a beautiful ring on your finger,” was the totally irrelevant response.

“A mere nothing—a mere nothing. Now, Nelly——”

“I never did see so pretty a ring,” persisted his enchantress.

He drew it off his finger.

“If you admire it so much, it should be yours. What will you give me for it, Nelly?”

“A kiss,” shyly.

“The ring is yours,” slipping it into her hand. “Now, for my payment.”

In an instant he was half strangled in a vigorous embrace, and a resounding smack was imprinted upon his lips.

As he succeeded in freeing himself, a ringing peal of laughter made music in the room, and to his utter astonishment Nell’s merry face appeared above the back of the chair.

Dunfounded, he glanced from Nell to the

still masked figure, and from the latter back to Nell again.

“Now what the foul fiend is all this?” he managed to vociferate at last. “In the devil’s name, what witch is this?”

“No witch at all,” retorted a shrill, rasping voice. And the mask was removed, revealing to his horrified gaze a rubicund countenance grinning from ear to ear.

Buckhurst involuntarily started back.

“That hag of the pit, Orange Moll!”

Hag! Moll was about to make some furious retort, but Nell, laying her hand upon her arm, checked her.

“Nay, Moll,” she said, “you can afford to forgive him, after the beautiful present he has made you. Indeed, my lord Buckhurst, what a terrible man you must be, to abduct two women on the same night.”

“Pshaw!” said Buckhurst, sulkily. “It is a wretched jest of those rascals, Etherege and Ogle. I was afraid to trust them and paid others to do the business.”

“Paid? Ah, well, we’ll say no more of that. But don’t expect me to believe any such cock-and-bull story. You always did have a weakness for the orange girls, you know.”

“Nell——”

“Oh, yes, you did; you know you did. Why

what was that rhodomontade you wrote of me, when I cried my wares with the others? Let me see, how did it go? Um—um—oh, yes—

The orange-basket her fair arm did suit,  
Laden with pippins and Hesperian fruit;  
This first step raised, to wond'ring pit she sol  
The lovely fruit smiling with streaks of gold.

I forget the rest of it. I thought it vastly pretty at the time. But," as if seized with a sudden suspicion, "gad's my life, I believe that it was Moll it was addressed to, after all."

"Oh, cease your nonsense, Nell, and let's to supper."

Nell turned to Moll, who was busily examining the ring and mentally appraising the value of it.

"Do you hear?" she cried, gaily. "Mistress Mary Dobson, my lord Buckhurst invites you to supper."

Buckhurst made a grimace and remarked ironically:

"Mr. Pepys, can you tell me who is the master of this house?"

"Why, I am, to be sure," interposed Nell. "But stay," solemnly, "are you certain that the supper is settled for?"

"Well, if it isn't," replied Buckhurst, laughing despite himself, "I assure you the cost of it won't come out of your pocket."

“All’s well, then! To table, good friends, to table!”

In spite of the incongruous elements of which the company was composed, the entertainment must have been a success, for Mr. Pepys chronicled in his diary that night:

*To my lord Buckhurst’s. A most excellent supper and a very merry company. Nell prettier and livelier than ever. Lord, what a whimsical creature it is! Did enjoy myself most hugely.*



## CHAPTER V.

### LOVE'S DESPERATE GAME.

**P**ERHAPS the most unhappy woman in all England was she who was its queen.

Catharine of Braganza had been reared in a Portuguese convent, had seen almost nothing of the world when she came to London as Charles' bride, and was not accustomed to the free conversation and licentious manners that prevailed at the court of her husband. Much that she saw and heard disgusted and terrified her. She really loved Charles, but she had never been able to obtain the least particle of his affections, freely bestowed as they were in other directions. Her lack of beauty was undoubtedly the chief cause of this failure, for, although she possessed a pair of very fine eyes and an agreeable smile, her figure was ungainly, her complexion was muddy, and she had a bad, uneven set of teeth. She was a woman of much cultivation, however, and excellent sense, and she used all her endeavors to please the king, being particularly attentive in promoting every sort of amusement

and pleasure at which she could be present herself. But her efforts were all of no avail; she could not turn the king from his profligate courses. Charles was always courteous to her and exacted from all the respect which was due to her position, but he openly neglected her for such women as the newly-created peeresses, the Duchess of Cleveland and the Countess of Castlemaine, who had little but their beauty to recommend them.

Since the departure of the attendants she had brought from Portugal, whom she had been obliged to send away on account of the dislike taken to them by Charles, who denominated them "those Portuguese frights who call themselves maids of honor," the poor queen had been painfully lonely. The only woman in whose society she found any pleasure and in whom she could confide was Lady Frances Stuart, who was superior to the indelicacy of the court, and refrained from the outspoken language of the age; when young women, even of the higher classes, conversed without circumspection or modesty.

Let us look in upon the queen's withdrawing-room the morning after the king's public reception. It was a beautiful room, furnished with taste and luxury, for Charles was lavish in providing everything that could contribute to his neglected wife's physical comfort.

It was the hour of the king's visit, for each morning he scrupulously devoted a certain portion of his time to his wife, a visit which, when out of her hearing he called doing penance, but which the poor queen looked forward to as the one bright spot of her day.

On this particular morning there were present besides the king and queen, Winifred Price and Mary Jennings, two newly-appointed and very pretty maids of honor; Lady Sanderson, the "mother" of the maids; Lady Frances Stuart, and James, Duke of York, the king's brother. No two brothers were ever more widely different in feature and character than Charles and James Stuart. The latter was ugly in person, arbitrary, obstinate and mean in disposition, and with none of that charm of manner which distinguished his brother. Moreover, he was much Charles' inferior in natural ability. His witty and graceless grace of Buckingham was not far wrong when he declared that the difference between them was that "the king could see things if he would and the duke would see things if he could."

York was a thorn in Charles' flesh at all times, and this morning he had been particularly disagreeable, having had the bad taste to lecture the king on the irregularity of his conduct in the presence of the queen, who sat si-

lently by, turning alternately white and red at her brother-in-law's strictures. For this, however, Charles cared but little, for he made slight attempt to conceal from the queen his misdoings, but he was annoyed at his brother's preachy interference.

"Odds fish, man," he exclaimed at last, impatiently, "the matter is not worth all this to-do. I love a pretty face, yes, and," with a twinkle in his eye, "that is more than can be said for yourself. You are a Catholic, and by Heaven, I believe your favorites are given you as penance for your sins."

The maids of honor laughed aloud at this, for Lady Bagot and the other ladies, whose society the duke affected, were notoriously ugly.

York scowled. To a man of his serious disposition Charles' levity was particularly rasping.

"And that is not all," he said, gruffly, "your majesty's escapades with Rochester, Buckingham and their ilk are unseemly, nay, worse, in you a crime."

"Since when was my brother my keeper to bait me as he would a bear?" replied Charles, with outwardly imperturbable good humor. "A crime! tush, your grace, Heaven will not damn a man for a little irregular pleasure."

"May Heaven forgive the blasphemy!" re-

sponded the duke with pious fervor; "but it was not of the future world I was thinking, but of this. The freedom with which you allow your person to be approached by persons of all conditions is dangerous to your life."

A smile flitted across the face of the king.

"No kind of danger, James," he replied, slyly, "for I am sure no man will take away my life to make you king."

At this thrust, even the queen could not repress a laugh, and, under cover of the merriment, Charles crossed the room to where Lady Frances Stuart was standing alone near the fireplace. More than usually lovely did she look this morning. Her robe of blue and silver brocade, worn with an elegance gained by a long residence in Paris and which was in striking contrast to the slatternly carelessness displayed by some of the ladies of quality, was peculiarly becoming to her fair beauty.

"Is Britannia still obdurate?" asked Charles, in a low tone, and fixing upon her a gaze full of intense admiration. "Will she never grant her king a moment in private?"

"Her king has a right to command his subject and his cousin," replied Lady Frances, calmly, although the rose in her cheek deepened just a trifle.

The term "cousin" was not misapplied, for

Lady Frances was descended from the same stock as royalty itself.

"Then you consent?" whispered Charles, eagerly.

"Yes."

"When?"

"After your majesty's departure, the queen attends private mass. I will make some excuse and remain here."

"I will depart at once then."

And suiting the action to the word, he returned to the queen and took leave of her, with a few pleasant, careless words, which meant nothing but which set poor Catharine's heart fluttering again with that hope which nothing could entirely down.

After the king and the duke had gone, the queen dismissed her ladies, all save Frances.

"My Frances," she cried when they were alone, her eyes still aglow from the king's last words, "My Frances, you, who are my only friend since they banished my poor Portuguese, let me talk to you. He was more affectionate to-day than usual, was he not? He may learn to love me yet."

The wistful tone in which this was said went straight to Frances' heart.

"Your majesty is so good," she said, evasively; "who could fail to love you?"

“Ah, even were I good, goodness is not always potent over men’s hearts. Oh, Frances, teach me how to win his. I love him so, and I know not how to make him love me.”

Lady Frances scarcely knew what to answer. She was convinced that the king’s affections would never be bestowed on her who should have possessed them by right, but she could not wound her gentle mistress by betraying her belief.

“Time works wonders,” she answered after a pause. “Who can tell what the future may have in store? And for the present, dear madam, you have the king’s respect, which—which those others have not.”

The queen shook her head sadly.

“Respect is cold. I fain would have something warmer.”

There was a moment’s silence, and then Catharine continued, timidly :

“Frances, I am cooped up here, weary. I long for some amusement. Vauxhall, Spring Gardens—why should we not go there?”

“We, your majesty!” exclaimed Lady Frances in startled surprise.

“Yes, why not? Jennings and Price are wild to go, and they have but little amusement here.” She paused and then continued almost

piteously: "Nay, I cannot play a part with you, Frances. I myself long to go."

"You!" ejaculated Frances, more and more astonished:

"Yes, I! some night when Charles is to be at one of those places."

"But why, your majesty?"

The queen flushed and hesitated.

"Because," she faltered, "I would be a witness of what pleases him best. I would learn what those amusements are which he affects. I would see something real, be it what it may. At the court I learn nothing."

Frances knelt down by the neglected wife's side and took one of her hands in both her own.

"Dear madam," she began, earnestly but affectionately, "may I speak my true mind to you?"

"Oh, do, do!" cried the queen fervidly, returning the warm pressure of the girl. "It is so rare for me to hear the truth."

"No man's love that deserves the name was ever won by woman's stooping. She that hopes to win it must be man's superior. Oh, dear lady and mistress, pray for him you love; suffer for him, die for him if need be; but, never to win return of his affection, descend from your dignity of queen, your higher dignity of woman."



Catharine made no reply, but she leaned over and kissed Frances upon the forehead.

As she did so the faint reverberation of the chapel bell fell upon her ear, and she rose hastily to her feet, crossing herself as she did so.

“May the Virgin and all the saints forgive me!” she murmured. “I have forgotten God of soul for God of heart. Come, Frances.”

“I pray your majesty to excuse me this morning; I have a slight migraine.”

“Oh, and I have been worrying you. Forgive me, dear child. Oh, my Frances, what should I do without you?”

She kissed the girl once again, and then hurried away to her devotions.

Left alone, Frances' mind reverted to her own troubles. The unwelcome attentions of the king had become unbearable to her, and she had determined, once for all, to put an end to them. It was for that reason that she had consented to see him alone, and for one other also, to induce him to make amends for the undeserved treatment he had accorded to the Duke of Richmond.

She was roused from her meditations by the cautious opening of the door, and looking up she saw the smiling face of the king. She rose at once and bent low in a profound obeisance.

“Nay, Lady Frances,” he protested, “no

homage, I pray. In your presence Charles would forget the king."

"Not as he did yesterday, I hope."

"What mean you? Oh! that salt-water swab!"

"Pardon me, your majesty, a noble gentleman and a faithful servant."

Charles made an impatient movement.

"I did not come here to speak of him"

"I refuse to speak on other subjects, your majesty, until that matter is settled."

"So! so!" ejaculated the king, with some anger. "What is this fellow to you that you take such an interest in him?"

"Nothing, your majesty," replied Lady Frances, unflinchingly telling the lie, when to speak the truth meant ruin to her lover. "But, as I was the unwilling cause of his ill-treatment, I would be the one to repair it."

"Ill-treatment! What the plague did the man mean by thrusting his frowzy flag in my face when I would have been alone with you? But that is nothing beside your frowns. Do but smile and I will perform any penance you choose to impose."

"You will?" and there could be no complaint of the lack of smiling brightness in her face now.

"Then, repair the injury you have done to

the Duke of Richmond," she demanded, with a lightness and gaiety which did much to disarm any suspicion that the king might have had that it was a matter of personal moment to her.

"But how?"

"Grant him an audience forthwith before the court with such honor as his name and gallant deeds deserve."

This was a hard pill for Charles to swallow, but with a grimace he forced it down.

"Needs must, I suppose, when the beauty of Britannia drives," he said, and rang a silver bell which stood upon the table. The page in waiting in the corridor at once appeared.

"Go to his Grace of Richmond's mansion. It is close by. Do you know where it is?"

"Yes, sire."

"Say to him that we grant him an audience in half an hour."

"Sooner," whispered Lady Frances, impelled by a twofold reason—to expedite the reparation due to Richmond and to cut as short as possible the interview with the king.

"Plague take it!" muttered Charles. "In half an hour," aloud to the page.

"And now," when the boy had departed on his errand, "let the magnanimity of King Charles the Second plead for the gracelessness

of that sad rogue, Charles Stuart, your most loving cousin."

This was said in his most winning manner, but it had no effect upon his companion, who answered him quietly :

"Ever my most gracious sovereign."

"Odds fish!" broke out Charles, impetuously, "why will you be eternally thrusting that accursed crown in my face?" Then approaching close to her side he continued with a passion which fairly startled her: "Here is no king, I tell you, but a man—a loving and somewhat hot-blooded man."

Here was the opportunity she desired, and instantly recovering herself, she grasped it like the brave-hearted woman she was.

Looking the king full in the face she replied calmly and distinctly, each word falling from her lips as clear-cut as crystal :

"And here is a woman, an unprotected, orphaned woman. If your kingly crown restrain you not, let her crown of maidenhood make her sacred."

Involuntarily the king drew back, awed by the purity of her face and the dignity of her bearing. But he was not a man to be repulsed so easily. He was at last alone with the woman who had entirely captured his royal fancy, and he was determined to make the most of it.

“Pshaw!” he said, with a gleam in his eyes that despite all her control made Frances Stuart shiver, “away with all royalty, save that of King Cupid, whose vassals we both are, the only king who knows no law but choice, no will but his own.”

“Your majesty’s love-canons and mine are strangely different,” said Lady Frances with a sarcasm so quiet as to be scarcely apparent, even to the king’s quick wits.

“Let me teach you mine,” he cried, eagerly.

Lady Frances drew herself up in all the pride of her outraged womanhood.

“Nay, sire, why look for more pupils?” and the irony now was plainly apparent. “Surely you have enough already, and you would find me as dull as you have found them apt.”

“You do yourself wrong. Do not compare yourself with those beings whose very names poison the air you breathe. I am not the dull fool you perchance think me. If I have been their slave, I have never been their dupe. No, it is not the king sated with many conquests who now pleads before you, but the man who for the first time loves with the passion which purifies like fire.”

As he spoke, his face became transfigured and his tone had the ring of truth. He thoroughly believed for the moment what he said;

and indeed, perhaps Frances Stuart did inspire in Charles the Second the nearest approach to a genuine, pure love that that monarch of many amours ever experienced.

The lady herself was inwardly deeply agitated, but she was more than ever determined to put an end to what was causing her such pain and discomfort.

“If I could believe this, sire,” she began, hesitatingly.

“You would love me,” cried the king ardently.

“No!” firmly and scornfully. “I would never see you again!”

There was no mistaking the sincerity of this response, which was like a dash of cold water upon the kindled hopes of the king. He was not accustomed to be treated in this manner, and the resistance with which he met served but to increase his passion the more. Carried away by his feelings he flung himself at her feet.

“Oh, Frances Stuart,” he murmured in genuine distress, “have you no pity on the most unhappy man in England!”

Frances started back. This was horrible.

“For heaven’s sake rise, sire,” she exclaimed in a fever of anxiety and alarm. “If any one should see you in this posture! Rise, I say!”

Slowly the king obeyed. The ardor died out of his face and was replaced by an expression of sullenness.

“Your majesty must remember whom I serve,” continued Frances, with a pleading earnestness, “your wife, your wronged, unhappy wife, whose heart is crying for your love and whom alone you can love without shame to yourself.”

“Lady Frances Stuart, you forget yourself,” replied Charles, harshly, his anger rapidly rising. “I did not come here to hear a sermon. Pah! I know your sex. I can read this coldness. It is not that you cannot love, but that you love another.”

Lady Frances started, and for a moment her composure forsook her.

“Your majesty,” she faltered in confusion.

“But let him beware!” interposed Charles, furiously. “Let him not cross my path. Let him who comes between you and me look to himself. The king brooks no rival with Frances Stuart.”

As these arrogant words fell upon her ear, Lady Frances’ whole demeanor was transformed as if by magic. All the pride of her royal blood flamed through her veins. Superb in her fierce indignation, with glowing cheeks and flashing eyes, she turned upon her king as

if she had been an insulted empress and he the humblest of her vassals. Reckless of all consequences, she cried impetuously and defiantly :

“ Even did I love another, you could hardly deny me the right to love one, you who love so many ! The man whom Frances Stuart loves will brave even Charles Stuart’s anger ! ”

This sudden outburst had the effect of calming Charles. It was with no fury, but with icy determination that he answered :

“ ‘Tis well. Whoever he is let him take heed to his footing. They all plot against their king, and their king, poor fool, laughs and forgives them. But for *this* one, let his foot trip, and his head shall answer for it ! Aye, his head, madam, though half the nation mourn about his scaffold ! ”

There was a loud slam of the door, and Frances was alone, the threatening words ringing dully in her ears like the clods of earth upon a coffin-lid. All her imperiousness, all her bravado was gone. Danger ! Danger to the man she loved, and through her folly ! White, weak and trembling she sank into a chair. What was to be done ? Useless to appeal to the king’s generosity. In this case she knew full well that the easy-going monarch would be as unyielding as steel. Why, oh, why had she been given this fatal beauty to thus attract the



king's caprice? And that other Charles, Richmond, whom she loved with every fibre of her being, with a first, last eternal love, and who had so cruelly doubted her. And yet he would doubt her even more in the future, lose all faith in her, perhaps believe the worst of her. For, there was but one thing to be done now—she must as jealously hide her love as she had once thought proudly to avow it. Her love should not destroy him, but save him. Ah! cruel king, his foot shall not slip! Frances Stuart will see to that. It is woman's wit against man's cruelty, and woman's wit shall triumph in the end!

She glanced up proudly, and there before her stood the very man of whom her heart was full.

Instead of showing Richmond to the king's closet the page had made a mistake and brought him to the queen's apartments. He had entered so quietly and Lady Frances had been so absorbed in her thoughts that she had not heard him.

"Richmond," she murmured, faintly.

"Yes, Richmond," he replied, with cold repression. "I scarce expected to find your ladyship here. I was told that his majesty had deigned to grant me an audience, and the page has even now gone to announce my presence."

As he spoke he was thinking: "The king has been here. That flush upon her cheek may

be due to his caresses," and the very thought fired his brain with a sensation akin to madness.

"It was at my request," said Lady Frances, gently, "that his majesty has promised to repair the—the seeming slight he put upon you."

The blood mounted redly to Richmond's forehead and his grasp tightened to a vise-like grip upon the battle flag he carried.

"At *your* request!" he exclaimed, hoarsely and with exceeding bitterness. "And I must stoop to take honor from the hand that may but now have pressed yours with passion. But that he is my king——" and he laid his hand threateningly upon his sword-hilt.

Lady Frances started to her feet and grasped his arm in an agony of entreaty.

"Richmond! For the love of heaven be more temperate! Be master of yourself! You shall know all. It is true. The king has but a few moments since urged his suit to me, and——"

He roughly shook off her hand, and interrupted with hot scorn:

"The confession comes somewhat late, my lady. Thanks to the gossip with which the court is ringing, I know all without your kind offices. Pray, spare your lips and my ears the recital of your shame."

A fierce thrill of indignation leapt up in her aching heart, only to be immediately and stern-

ly repressed. This was no time for resentment. Matters were in too critical a condition for that. Let him think of her as he would, hate her if he chose; so he would be safe until she dared to reveal the truth. For the present it would be words wasted to attempt to convince him of the foul injustice of his suspicions.

“Richmond,” she began, forcing herself to be calm, “will you grant me one request? Meet me this evening in the queen’s gallery. I have that to say to you which you must hear, both for your safety and my honor.”

For a moment he was silent, half tempted to agree to hear her; but it was only for a moment, and then his miserable doubts, which were fast assuming certainty in his mind, swept away all other considerations, and he replied coldly:

“It is uncourteous perhaps to refuse the request of so fair and *favoured* a lady, but what you do me the honor to propose to me is impossible.”

“Impossible! You decline me an interview, then?”

“I regret to be obliged to do so. But, my flag and letters delivered, I return this evening to the fleet.”

“To the fleet! To-night!”

“Yes. The Dutch still hold the sea. We can scarce fail to meet them ere long. And,”

with a mixture of stern determination and hopeless despair, "it will go hard with me if I cannot find a friendly bullet and a sailor's honorable grave. It is all I have to hope for now."

As he spoke, he turned his back upon her, and walked away to the fire-place.

Frances grew white to the very lips and she stretched out her arms toward him in agonizing supplication. But before she could speak there fell upon her ears the announcement:

"His majesty, the king!"

Ah! The time had come. Away with all weakness! Her woman's wit must now come to the rescue, and at all costs save the man she loved. Yes, save him she must and would! No matter what the consequences might be, she would prevent his throwing away his life and with it hers that hung upon it.

The king hurriedly entered the room, accompanied by the Duke of York, Lord Shaftesbury and Samuel Pepys, whom, as representatives of the Admiralty, he had commanded to be present at the audience with Richmond.

As Charles saw who the occupants of the room were, Lady Frances' defiant words returned to him. Was this sailor duke the man she loved? Consumed with jealousy, he determined to discover this if possible.

With a courteous enough salutation to Richmond, he said to Frances :

“Lady Frances, a word with you,” and drawing her a little aside, he demanded abruptly : “You pleaded with me for this duke ; what did it mean ?”

Oh ! the strength of woman, when there is question of him whom she loves ! Man, the so-called lord of creation, can never hope to approach it. With consummate self-possession, without a quiver of a feature or a tremor of the voice, Lady Frances answered :

“And because I asked for simple justice, your majesty infers that he may be the rival you threatened so soundly.”

“Beware ! ’tis ill to jest on some subjects.”

She smiled up in his face in the most guileless manner in the world.

“Nay, if your majesty is determined to suspect all I ask favors for, your hands will be full ; for I have another suit to proffer.”

“Command me, but not for this Richmond.”

“On the contrary, my suit will be apt to offend his grace of Richmond,” replied Frances, still smiling.

“’Tis granted, then,” with a glance at Richmond, who stood moodily apart, this whispered conversation of Lady Frances with the king

being to his fevered imagination but another confirmation of what he feared.

That others also drew their conclusions was evident from the significant glances exchanged between Shaftesbury and the Duke of York.

"Then, this is my suit," continued Frances, "that your majesty take the Duke of Richmond's command and give it——"

"To whom?"

"To my lord Buckhurst."

Charles gave a quick glance into the fair, calm face before him, and then breathed a sigh of relief. So Richmond was not the man after all! Buckhurst? But a moment's reflection convinced him that this idea was absurd. Buckhurst was rarely at court, and, moreover, he was not the man to take captive the fancy of such a woman as La Belle Stuart. Well, so long as it was not Richmond, that was enough for the present. Besides, to send Buckhurst from London was by no means disagreeable. His lordship had been altogether too hot after pretty Nelly, and it might be well to be rid of him.

"Your suit is granted," he said aloud. "At Britannia's request, my lord Buckhurst shall have the command."

"Master Pepys!"

"Your majesty!"

“What is the name of the Duke of Richmond’s ship?”

“The Rupert, sire,” replied Pepys, thanking his lucky stars that he happened to know, and so the king had not caught him napping.

Charles turned toward the waiting duke.

“Now, my lord of Richmond.”

Richmond advanced and, kneeling, laid the flag and a bundle of papers at the king’s feet.

“I am charged to present to your majesty these letters from Sir Edward Spragge, containing an account of the last sea-fight; and this flag, the trophy of the victory that has attended your majesty’s arms.”

“’Tis well,” returned the king, graciously. “Sir Edward has selected a worthy messenger.”

“And, this duty done, I crave your majesty’s permission to return to the fleet.”

“Not so. We cannot risk all our dukes in the struggle with these knavish Mynheers. We would have your grace near our person.”

“But, sire,” protested Richmond, in astonishment, “it is my dearest wish to serve your majesty and defend my country at sea.”

“And our good pleasure is to keep you for use on shore. Your command is filled up.”

At this abrupt and unexpected declaration, Richmond turned scarlet with resentment and indignation. Lady Frances’ heart ached with

pity for him, but even had she had any desire to undo what she herself had brought about it was too late now.

Richmond rose slowly to his feet, and in a voice choked with emotion, repeated :

“My command filled up! Who has prevailed upon your majesty to put this shame upon me?”

The king was silent for a moment before replying. It had suddenly occurred to him that this might be a woman's cunning to avert suspicion from Richmond. He determined to watch them both.

“Your ship is wanted by a fair lady, and under such conditions, I am sure that your grace is too gallant to regret the sacrifice.”

“May I ask the fair lady's name?” ejaculated the duke with difficulty.

“Lady Frances Stuart, here. She has asked the command of the Rupert to give it to Lord Buckhurst.”

As the king spoke, he was watching Lady Frances narrowly, but not a muscle of the fair countenance changed; it was as peaceful and smiling as a May morning. Not so with the duke, however. His brow grew black as night, and upon his lips there trembled a furious malediction, which was with difficulty repressed.



Charles was satisfied; there was no collusion here.

“Mr. Pepys,” he said, “see that my lord Buckhurst’s commission is made out for the Rupert. And now,” he continued, in a sprightly tone, “who’s for the playhouse? It is already after four. Fair Lady Frances, will you honor my servants with your presence?”

“With pleasure, your majesty,” replied Lady Frances, determined to play out her part to the end, although no one but herself would ever know the tortures it caused her to do so.

“My Britannia, you see how I obey,” murmured the king, as he led her from the room. “At your bidding I have affronted the proudest nobleman in England.”

“I thank your majesty,” replied Frances, forcing her lips to smile, while her heart lay in her breast like a lump of lead.

In the queen’s withdrawing-room Richmond stood alone—dazed, crushed, desperate at the insult thus publicly proffered him at the instigation of the woman he loved, the woman who had professed to love him.

## CHAPTER VI.

### DETHRONE HIM!

**H**OW Richmond found his way out of the palace and into the open streets, he never knew. He strode away aimlessly, heedless of those about him, neither knowing nor caring where he went. Once or twice he was accosted; but he returned no answer to the salutations. In fact, he did not hear them.

One man who was thus ignored, a man with a thin, cadaverous face and hollow eyes, turned and walked after him.

On went the duke, followed at a short distance by the other, now turning to the right, now to the left, now straight ahead, until he came to Covent Garden, with its noisy, ill-smelling market. Here he seemed to recover himself, for he passed his hand over his eyes and looked about him, like a man suddenly awakening from a deep slumber.

Just across the way was a coffee-house, bearing the sign of "The Royal Oak," a most popular one at that time on account of the friendly

branches that had once sheltered the king when a fugitive.

Into this coffee-house Richmond turned. The public room, with its clean-swept brick floor and its monumental fire-place was deserted save for half a dozen young gallants, who were making merry at the expense of a rural squire who had come to town to see the sights; at his expense both figuratively and literally, for, while his purse paid for the wine they were consuming, they were making merry with insolent jests at his countrified dress, manner and accent.

Richmond sat down at a table in the corner furthest from the noisy roysterers and ordered of the waiter a stoop of Burgundy. Like one fevered with a thirst which would not be quenched, he drank bowl after bowl of the strong beverage, while, oblivious to all around him, he sat absorbed in his bitter reflections. Could he be the same man who so short a time before had come to London full of enthusiastic loyalty to his king and his heart beating high with the anticipated joy of beholding once again the face that was all the world to him? Now the thought of his king stirred his blood to madness, and the idol of his soul lay prostrate, dishonored in the dust. She was false, worse than false, a creature to take her place among the other shameless beauties of the

king's seraglio. She had struck him in the face before them all, broken his sword, broken his heart, but he would have revenge upon her, aye, and upon that satyr king, whose look corrupted a woman, whose touch turned her to stone.

"Curse him!" he muttered aloud, striking his hand upon the table so fiercely that the wine before him overflowed its receptacle and discolored the white boards with a stain red as blood. "Curse him!"

"Curse not at all!" sounded in low, deep accents. "Curse not at all! To curse is a sin."

Richmond started, and as he raised his eyes for the first time, they met the penetrating gaze of Major Wilding, who, unperceived by the moody duke, had entered and seated himself on the other side of the table.

"Major Wilding! You here!"

"I crave your pardon, your grace," said Wilding, gravely, "for intruding upon your privacy, but I have that to say which may not be unpleasant to your ears."

"You must be a conjurer then," retorted Richmond, bitterly.

Wilding flashed a quick glance at him and then continued, quietly:

"I will not affect, your grace, to be ignorant

of the unmerited misfortune which has overtaken you."

"So, is it already common gossip?"

"Not yet, but public, business called me to Whitehall this afternoon, and there I heard that your command had been taken from you and given to my lord Buckhurst."

He did not add that, immediately on being informed of this by Master Pepys' busy tongue, he had hastened away to waylay the duke for purposes of his own.

Ordinarily, Richmond would have disdained to discuss his private affairs, but the bitterness of his humiliation and the strength of the fiery potations he had indulged in, and to which he was unused, had unnerved him and rendered him reckless.

"Is it known at whose instance this—this exchange was effected?" he asked.

"At whose could it be but at hers whose word is his majesty's law."

A fierce malediction burst from Richmond's lips.

"Alas," proceeded Wilding, "our poor country is in a sad state. You have seen what the court is."

"Yes," broke in Richmond, furiously, "I have seen what it is! God help me! I have

seen it! Bankrupt alike in credit and decency! All corrupt! All impure!"

Wilding gave a quick glance about the room. To all intents and purposes they were alone. The gay party at the other end were too intent upon their own enjoyment to note anything else.

"True! Only too true!" said Wilding, fixing his eyes again upon Richmond's flushed, scowling face. "And can this infamy last? Ought it to last!"

"We are powerless."

"No, not powerless. Your grace, the people are never powerless. And it is not alone the corruption of the court we have to complain of," he continued hurriedly, "the very existence of the nation is in danger. The Dutch at Chatham, and yet a woman's smile takes the command of a ship from a man who has been a sailor from boyhood and gives it to a novice! Duke of Richmond, there was a time when the flag of England was not insulted, when all foreign powers trembled at the name of England, when the virtue of English matrons was a higher power than the looseness of French wantons."

"Would that those times were come again!"

"But," said Wilding, "in those days England was not a monarchy, but a republic."

“Still, I say, would that those times were come again!” reiterated Richmond, recklessly.

This was what his companion had been looking for, the opportunity to draw the outraged duke into his net. Wilding, although a fanatic, was an honest one, which adjective could not be applied to some of his fellow conspirators in the plot in which he was engaged. His puritanical soul revolted at the light behavior of king and courtiers. Anything that savored of Popery was to him the very incarnation of Satan, and not only was the Duke of York an avowed Papist, but the king himself was strongly suspected of a leaning toward Rome. To Wilding’s mind the only way to rescue the land from destruction was to expel the king (and, if necessary, he would not have shrunk from even stronger measures than expulsion) and to restore the commonwealth. As has already been intimated, a plot was on foot to effect these very things and Wilding was heart and soul in the movement. His every effort was exerted to obtain recruits to the cause, and it was with this end in view that he had followed the duke, whose name would be a tower of strength in the contemplated uprising.

With eyes glittering with excitement, Wilding leaned across the table closer to Richmond.

“My lord of Richmond,” he said in low

tense tones, "a few minutes ago I heard you invoke curses on the man who has sought to work your destruction. Again I say to you, curse him not."

He paused and then, with the utmost intensity, hissed, rather than spoke, two words pregnant with meaning:

"Dethrone him!"

Richmond started violently.

"What mean you, Major Wilding? This is treason."

"Treason! Nay, it is loyalty! loyalty to our country, to our homes, to the honor of our sons, to the virtue of our daughters! Duke of Richmond, I know you to be an honorable gentleman, and to your ears I am about to intrust a secret of no small moment to all true patriots."

And before Richmond could protest, he proceeded with much ardor and eloquence to inform him of the plans of himself and his companions. If, a week previous, any one had dared to hint to Richmond that he would have listened to words of disloyalty, to threats against his sovereign, he would have stretched the bold speaker senseless at his feet. But, smarting as he was now under his unmerited disgrace, tortured by the thought of his lady love's shameful infidelity, he not only listened,



but his heart bounded with fierce joy at the possible downfall of his royal rival.

"The feebler spirits are still led by titles," concluded Wilding, almost certain from Richmond's excited attention that he was theirs; "each known name brings us a thousand meaner ones. My lord of Richmond, our holy cause asks your support."

"I will think of it," replied Richmond, unsteadily, draining the cup before him to the dregs.

"Nay, my lord," urged Wilding, his deep-set eyes flashing with excitement, "why delay? See!" throwing back his coat and drawing from an inside pocket a bundle of papers. "See! here are documents in duplicate signed by the heads of our plot. The disaffection must break out first in the fleet; the fire is already smoldering; it needs but a spark to burst into flame. One of these copies I am to take to the fleet, the other I leave with the Duke of Buckingham; thus we mutually bind ourselves."

"Buckingham!" exclaimed Richmond, in blank amazement, that the king's closest companion should have aught to do with such a scheme.

Wilding's pale face flushed. The mention of the duke's name had been a slip, but it was too

late to rectify it, and now, more than ever, must he have Richmond's name.

"My lord, there is a blank," he said eagerly, "a blank left next to Buckingham. I would fain see that blank filled by a noble name. What, do you hesitate?"

Richmond drew a long breath. This astonishing disclosure had partially sobered him.

"Yes, Major Wilding," he replied, gravely and sadly, "I do hesitate. To you it is a small matter to subscribe to the upsetting of the king; your place is among the people, but I was born by the side of the throne. We of the nobility lend our lustre to the crown and draw our lustre from it. Besides, I am half drunk now. Wait until I am sober. Perhaps I shall be unhappy enough then to sign anything—that is, if I live."

"What means your grace?" asked Wilding, touched in spite of himself at the utter despair of the last words.

"Major Wilding, I would die defending my country from the invader rather than—" he paused, abruptly. No, her name should not be mentioned. "I am going to my lord Buckhurst at once, this moment, to crave his permission to serve under him in the 'Rupert'."

"What!" cried Wilding, in astonishment. "Lord Buckhurst takes your command from

you and you would beg him to let you serve on board the 'Rupert' as a volunteer!"

"Your pardon, Major Wilding, but pray say no more. My resolution is taken," replied Richmond, haughtily.

Wilding possessed both sense and tact, and he saw that it would be useless to combat the duke's determination, or for the present, to urge him further to sign the paper. It would be dangerous, however, now to be without his signature, and he determined to leave no stone unturned to obtain it.

"I have placed myself in your grace's power, and——"

"You need have no fear, Major Wilding. I shall not betray you."

"When may I see your grace again?"

"When you please," replied Richmond, indifferently, rising and preparing to leave the coffee-house.

He was fortunate enough to find Buckhurst at home and with him the worthy secretary of the Admiralty, for Master Pepys with his usual eagerness to be the first to relate any news, had at once hurried away to inform the new commander of the "Rupert" of his good fortune.

Buckhurst was greatly astonished at Richmond's appearance, and still more so when he heard the request that nobleman had to proffer.

He did all that he could to dissuade him from his design, but without effect, and he finally consented to accede to his grace's request, that is, if there was no objection in higher quarters.

When this was arranged, Buckhurst said, gaily :

“And now, after business, pleasure! Shall we go to the theatre? We shall be in time for the last act or two. Mistress Gwynne acts Celia in *The Humorous Lieutenant*, in which part she is excellent.”

“It could not be better done in nature,” corroborated Pepys, solemnly.

Richmond was about to refuse, but he suddenly remembered that Lady Frances was to be there, and with that insane desire for self-torture, which seems to belong exclusively to unhappy lovers, he determined to go.

Lady Frances was not there, however. Either she had not come at all, or she had retired early. Richmond fixed his eyes upon the stage, but he neither saw the actors nor heard a word of the play. When Buckhurst proposed to pay a visit to Nell Gwynne in her dressing-room, he languidly consented. It mattered but little to him what he did. But he was cold and absent, and even Nell's liveliest sallies could not draw from him a smile.

“What is he? A bear?” she whispered to Buckhurst.

“My dear,” was the half jesting, half serious answer, “he is a man who is dying of love.”

At once Nell grew interested.

“I am delighted to see him then, for that is a malady I have never met with outside of a play-book.”

It was long after midnight when Richmond separated from Buckhurst. For the first time in his life he drank long and deep, and he retired to bed to sleep the blessed sleep of forgetfulness, oblivious alike of the joys and sorrows of this world.

## CHAPTER VII.

### BROKEN TIES.

**R**ICHMOND awoke the next morning with a throbbing head, and that dull ache at his heart, that vague sense of calamity we all have felt the day after some terrible misfortune, before we are thoroughly aroused and our senses are in their normal condition.

As the events of the day before came back to him in all their dread reality, he leaped from his couch and proceeded hastily to dress. In the full possession of his faculties, it seemed to him all a horrible dream. It could not be true that Lady Frances Stuart was what she had appeared to be. He had known her from childhood, and he had never known her anything but honest, pure and loyal. It was not her fault, she was under some spell, or—but it was useless to speculate. He would see her, see her once more and solve the question beyond the shadow of a doubt. But how could he manage an interview? It would be scarcely dignified to go to Whitehall after the slight put upon

him by the king, and, moreover, it was unlikely that she would consent to see him. He must try to meet her as if by chance. But how? And then he remembered that when he was in London before, it had been her majesty's custom to walk every fine morning in Saint James' Park, attended by her ladies. He would go there and perhaps fate would be kind to him.

It was a beautiful morning, the park, with its smooth turf and its beautiful elms and lindens, looked fresh and fair in the rays of the early sun; and Richmond felt his heart grow lighter as he strolled beneath the shade of the trees that bordered the canal.

Suddenly a burst of merry laughter rang out upon his ears, and, glancing through the branches, he saw on the other side of the stream a group of ladies attended by one or two gentlemen. One of the latter he recognized as Sir Thomas Ogle, who was gentleman in waiting to the queen. Here, then, must be the object of his search. As he gazed with eager eyes one of the ladies detached herself from the group and strolled slowly along the bank. She was masked, as was the custom of all ladies of quality, when appearing in public, but there was no mistaking that exquisite figure, that graceful carriage. It was she. He

watched her slowly walk along, until she reached a rustic bridge that spanned the stream. Then she paused, removed her mask, and stood leaning upon the rail and gazing dreamily down into the sluggish waters. What would he not have given to know her thoughts. Suddenly a gentleman joined her, they remained a few moments in conversation, and then, crossing the bridge, they came directly toward the spot where Richmond was standing.

Not caring to meet her in the presence of a third party, the duke hastened to conceal himself behind the trunk of a large elm.

If Richmond had slept heavily the previous night, such had not been the case with Lady Frances. In vain had she wooed the drowsy god, he had been deaf to all her entreaties. Before her eyes was ever the face of the man she loved, pale and anguish-stricken as she had seen it last. Now she longed to fly to him and explain all, and now her pride revolted at the thought of the contemptuous manner in which he had refused her request to meet her in the queen's gallery. It was cruel of him to judge her thus without giving her an opportunity to clear herself. Had he no faith in her? Was his love so shallow that he could not trust her? He was unworthy of her; she would think no



more of him. And yet—and yet—she loved him more than ever. Away with all disguise! He had won her maiden heart, wholly and unreservedly, she had given herself to him and his she was and his alone forever.

When morning dawned at last, she rose, wearied alike in mind and body, and prepared to accompany the queen to the park. Once there, however, the vapid compliments of Sir Thomas Ogle and the frivolous chatter of Jennings, Wells and the other maids of honor jarred upon and disgusted her. So, making her excuses to the queen, she walked away by herself, with her own sad thoughts as her sole company. As she stood upon the bridge, little conscious that the man of whom her heart and mind were full, was, at that very moment, devouring her with his eyes, she was startled from her reverie by the unwelcome sound of a voice pronouncing her name.

Turning, she saw Lord Buckhurst, who had approached from the other side of the bridge. Annoyed at having her privacy thus intruded upon, she returned his greeting coldly enough, but Buckhurst, who was in the highest of spirits, did not appear to notice her chilliness.

“Is it indeed you, Lady Frances?” he cried, gaily. “I thought at first that I had wandered into the realms of mythology, and that the god-

dess of the dawn herself was before my enraptured vision."

Lady Frances frowned slightly, but made no reply. She detested the high-flown compliments so much in vogue.

"Sweet Lady Frances," proceeded Buckhurst, more soberly, "I am your debtor beyond all words to express for the favor you have conferred upon me, for I hear that it is to your influence that I owe my appointment to the Rupert. I am indeed fortunate to have for a patroness one who is all potent with his majesty."

Lady Frances grew hot with mortification. She felt instinctively what inference Buckhurst was drawing from the success of his suit at her hands, and yet she was powerless to prevent it. There was nothing in his words which she could resent. It was inexpressibly galling to her proud nature to be classed in men's minds with the Portsmouths and the Clevelands, but, to save her lover, she had drawn it upon herself and she had no right to complain.

"I trust, my lord, that you may prove yourself worthy of the command entrusted to you."

"Worthy! Ah! that depends on the point of view. As captain of a ship, I shall have ample leisure and shall write such sea-songs."

Songs, and the nation in danger! Was this

the man for whom she had craved command of a ship! She said nothing, but her eyes spoke such boundless contempt that Buckhurst quailed beneath her gaze. To do him justice, the careless way of speaking which had become habitual to him was at fault and not his real feelings. He had long desired a ship and he was determined to do his duty to the best of his ability. He saw his mistake and hastened to say :

“Forgive me, Lady Frances. I meant it not. My wild tongue runs away with me. I will try to deserve your confidence, believe me. By the way, who do you think came to me, yesterday, to beg me to allow him to serve as a volunteer in the Rupert?”

“Indeed, I cannot imagine,” replied Lady Frances, carelessly.

“Why, who but her former commander, his grace of Richmond.”

Instantly the lady was all attention.

“Richmond!” she exclaimed, “Richmond!”

“Yes, what think you of that! It was a sad lowering of his pride, was it not?”

Lady Frances was silent. Richmond a volunteer on the Rupert! Were then all her efforts, the efforts which had already cost her so dear and were likely to cost her much dearer in the future, to be of no avail? Suddenly she

became aware that her companion was regarding her with a peculiar expression, and she flushed as if she had betrayed her inmost thought.

“My lord,” she said, a little nervously, “will you walk with me a short distance? I—I need the exercise.”

She must have time to decide what to do in this new complication, and she could not stand there with Buckhurst apparently reading her countenance. Buckhurst, although somewhat surprised, gladly assented to the request, and they walked in silence down the broad avenue between the elms.

Lady Frances at last made up her mind as to what course to pursue, and, as chance would have it, she halted under the very tree behind which Richmond was concealed.

“My Lord Buckhurst,” she began composedly, idly toying with the mask she held in her hand, “what was it you said? The duke of Richmond desires to serve as a volunteer on board the Rupert?”

“Yes, your ladyship. A odd idea, is it not?”

“More than that; it is folly. My lord, you said a few moments ago that you owed me something in return for the command which the king gave you, at my entreaty.”

At her entreaty! The words fell like a knell

upon Richmond's listening ears. He had hoped that there might have been some mistake, some reason for her conduct of yesterday. But there could be no doubt, now, after that shameless confession. His first impulse was to rush out and confront her, but, on second thoughts, he concluded to wait and hear further.

"I am deeply your ladyship's debtor indeed," Buckhurst was saying.

"Then, like a hard creditor, I shall demand payment at once, or rather make myself your debtor in return."

"I am your ladyship's to command."

"This request of the Duke of Richmond is not for his credit, it is madness, and I therefore ask you not to permit him to serve under you."

Buckhurst hesitated a moment before replying.

"I would most gladly obey you, Lady Frances," he said, at last, "but, not to deceive you, when the duke came to me, I practically acceded to his request. If I deny him now, I shall seem to break my word."

Lady Frances' lip curled, and then she replied curtly, with a cold threat in her tone and manner:

"My lord, your commission is not yet made out. It needs but a word from me, and——"

Buckhurst understood, and he hurriedly interrupted:

“Nay, my fair patroness, since you are so peremptory, there’s nothing more to be said. The Duke of Richmond shall not set foot upon the Rupert while I command her.”

This was too much for Richmond’s self-control. He emerged from his place of concealment, and, dark and glowering, stood before them.

With a little cry, Lady Frances turned a startled look upon the intruder. When she recognized him the color forsook her cheek and she staggered a little as if about to fall. Buckhurst made a step toward her, but, recovering herself, she proudly waved him back.

“Your ladyship may well be alarmed,” said Richmond, folding his arms, and speaking with the most cutting irony, “at the appearance of the victim of your treachery, but thank Heaven, I am your dupe no longer. Oh! woman, woman, why do you continue to persecute me? Was it so great a crime to love you? Is every path of honor to be closed to me because you have forfeited men’s respect?”

‘Lady Frances started as if stung by an adder.

“Are you mad?” she cried hoarsely. “What,” struggling hard to regain a sem-

blance of composure, "what is our—our misunderstanding to this gentleman?"

"What is it to you whether I go on board the Rupert or not?" demanded Richmond roughly.

"Nothing," was the icy answer, "from this moment, nothing. My lord," addressing Buckhurst, "I withdraw my request."

Buckhurst bowed and gladly took advantage of the opportunity to retire from a position in which he was entirely out of place.

The uninterrupted interview, which both had desired so strongly, was now theirs, but neither man nor woman was in a temper to bring about the explanation which would have averted so much pain and disaster in the future. After the conversation between Buckhurst and Lady Frances which he had overheard, Richmond leaped at once to the conclusion that she was all that his worse suspicions had given her credit for; while Lady Frances, on her side, was too outraged by the duke's insulting words and manner to care for the moment what error he might fall into.

"What can your object be in thus thwarting me on every side?" demanded Richmond, with rising passion. "You have ruined me both body and soul. I was a man of honor. I loved truth, I loved my country, I loved you. But

in one day you robbed me of my faith in woman, and my hopes of glory. Cannot you, who have reached the highest pinnacle of your ambition, leave me at least the chance of death?"

Lady Frances grew harder with every moment and every word he uttered. How dare he not only think, but speak, so foully of her? Fixing upon him a cold, steady gaze, she replied, contemptuously:

"What, is glory to be gained only on board the *Rupert*? Honor has a thousand paths. Take any one of them, my lord! Be yourself again, a nobleman and, above all, a man."

"And you say this; you who have unmanned me."

"A doubting heart has unmanned you, Duke of Richmond. Your mind has been poisoned by unworthy suspicions, and——"

"Unworthy suspicions!" interrupted Richmond passionately, the angry pain and despair at his heart dominating him more and more as he proceeded. "Unworthy suspicions, forsooth! Have I not eyes to see, ears to hear! Is it not known throughout all the court who is the real monarch, who pulls the strings that Charles Stuart may dance?"

"Stop, my lord! Be yourself, for your own sake, if not for mine."



But Richmond was too beside himself to pause now.

“We obey our friends and not our enemies, still less a treacherous enemy like you, your ladyship—or perhaps I should say your grace, for in the ranks of duchesses is, by the king’s command, more than one woman of your ilk.”

If the lightning of infuriated eyes could deal death, Richmond would have fallen lifeless beneath the blaze that Lady Frances flashed upon him at this insult. All her pride was up in arms, the royal blood in her veins seemed turned to fire.

“How dare you!” The voice was low, but fraught with passion, and each word was as cutting as the thrust of a rapier. “How dare you address such words to me! But, henceforth your words and actions are alike indifferent to me. I mingle no further in your affairs. Either I am what cowards and liars say I am, the king’s minion, or I am Frances Stuart *sans peur et sans reproche*. In either case I am no more to you than which I was. I am nothing to you and you are nothing to me! Unmannerly, ungrateful, dishonored duke, farewell forever!”

How magnificently beautiful she looked, how superb she was in her indignation! And Richmond’s head bowed before her in involuntary

shame. But even had he desired to proffer an apology it was too late now. With head erect, a bitter, scornful smile upon the perfect lips, and with the stately motion of an offended Juno, she passed out of his presence, and to the desperate man it seemed as if a never-to-be-lifted pall settled down over his life.

That night, when Major Wilding returned to his home, he did so with the utmost joy and satisfaction, for upon the documents carefully hidden away in his breast was inscribed, just beneath that of the Duke of Buckingham, the name of Charles, Duke of Richmond, signed, as that reckless, hopeless nobleman frantically declared, "with his blood and that of all his house!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### AN ASMODEAN GLIMPSE.

SIX weeks have passed away, weeks which have brought more or less important changes to many of the characters of our story, but none perhaps more striking than to the leading light of his majesty's company of players.

Nell Gwynne no longer lives in modest lodgings in Petticoat Lane, but occupies a handsome mansion in one of the finest districts of the city; no longer does she drive to and from the theatre in a hired vehicle, but in her own luxurious coach drawn by gray Flemish mares, then the height of fashion. In vain will Davenant of the Duke's endeavor to draw her away from Drury Lane, for she is under the king's protection and nothing can sway her from her allegiance.

Let us not be too severe upon poor Nelly, nor, in our superior virtue, be too ready to cast stones upon her. The actions of one age should not be judged according to the ideas of another,

and to arrive at a just estimate of the good or evil of another's life, there should be taken into account the surroundings of that life and the circumstances which affected it.

Nell Gwynne lived in a time when virtue was almost universally sneered at and to be the favorite of a king was the highest ambition of many a woman of birth and breeding.

And Nell was not a woman of either birth or breeding. She was born of low estate and of poor parents, and, when a mere chit of a girl, was engaged as female tapster in a fourth-class tavern, where,

“ Her first employment was, with open throat,  
To cry fresh herrings, even ten a groat.”

From here she took the only dowry that Fortune had bestowed upon her, a pretty face, a melodious voice and a quick wit, to the market for which they were best fitted—the theatre. The first footing she obtained here was in a most humble capacity, that of orange girl. While in this position she attracted the attention of Lacy, one of the most popular actors of his day as well as a man of more than usual literary attainments. He undertook her education and tutored her in acting, the lover's part being that he most preferred. Through his influence she rose to that platform for which nature had intended her, the stage. She was

not much more than fifteen when she made her first appearance and almost immediately leaped into unexampled popularity. The stage at that time was a hotbed of vice, and Nell did not pass through it unscorched. Is it a wonder, then, that, brought up in such a school, she failed to turn a deaf ear to the soft pleadings of a king, especially when that king was the first and only man she ever really loved?

With all her failings, Nell had a tender as well as a generous heart. When raised to wealth, she expended her riches on others rather than on herself. She was continually doing good, "as if," a writer of the times observes, "doing good was her business instead of her nature." The king trusted her absolutely, as indeed he had reason to do, for, from the time of her connection with him to the day of her death, she was absolutely faithful to him, being in this and in many other respects a striking contrast to her rivals in his affections. She was never rapacious, accepting smilingly what he chose to give her and never asking for more; and she never abused the influence she possessed, but used it invariably for good objects.

She understood the nature of the king thoroughly, never worrying him for favors nor upbraiding him for his infidelities, and it is little wonder that Charles turned with relief from the

greediness and vapors of his favorites to the unvarying good humor and sparkling wit of the actress.

It is needless to say that she was hated by such women as her grace of Cleveland, erst Barbara Palmer, and her grace of Portsmouth, who as Louise de Quérouaille had been sent over by the French king to obtain an ascendancy over Charles' susceptible nature, an office in which she only too lamentably succeeded.

However bitterly they felt toward merry Nelly, these noble dames nevertheless rarely ventured to display their rancor in her presence, for, though remarkably sweet-tempered by nature, she could hold her own in a duel of tongues and was an astonishing mistress of invective when occasion required.

The people adored her, the mob never attacked her as it did the others of the king's mistresses, and she was never the butt of the lampoons and invectives so freely and viciously flung at Portsmouth, Cleveland, Mazarin and the others.

The following anecdote is a good illustration of the feeling of the populace toward her: Once, when Charles had ordered an extravagant service of plate for Louise de Quérouaille, rudely called by the citizens of London Madam Carwell, a great crowd collected before the

windows of the jeweller in Cheapside where it was displayed, cursing the duchess and wishing that the plate were melted and poured down her throat; "but," they added, "what a pity that it should not be bestowed on Madam Ellen."

And Nell was happy; yes, strange as it may appear, she was happy. She loved her art, she rejoiced in the hearty good will shown her by the public, she delighted in the kindnesses she was enabled to show to the needy and deserving, aye, and to the undeserving, too, and, more than all, was she happy in her devotion to the king. What she gave him was not all virgin gold, perhaps, but that lack was almost atoned for by the unselfishness and single-heartedness of her attachment.

Of the change in Nell's condition, her jealous swain, Buckhurst, knew nothing, for news in that day of sluggish conveyances traveled slowly, and he had long since departed to take command of his ship. Take command! Well, it could only be called that by courtesy, for like the others of the so-called gentleman captains of which there were far too many, Buckhurst was deplorably deficient in seamanship, and he was therefore like the rest of his ilk, forced to abandon the working of his ship to his underlings, which, succeeding as he did a man

like Richmond, who had followed the sea from boyhood, made him despised by his crew and was fatal to all discipline.

For a time the Dutch had been held in check and even forced back to the mouth of the river, but this was due more to a fortunate chain of circumstances than anything else, and Van Tromp speedily recovered his ground, so that the Dutch fleet had now penetrated further up the Thames than ever, to the great alarm of the citizens. London was in a most excitable condition, and loud and numerous were the grumbings against the indolence of the government and especially against the naval administration, which, beyond doubt, was a prodigy of wastefulness, ignorance and corruption.

The time now seemed ripe for the outbreak of the plot with which Buckingham was connected and of which Major Wilding was the master-spirit. The temporary success of the English fleet had compelled the postponement of the contemplated uprising, for it had been determined that the movement should begin in the fleet, and a time of apparent success was not a time to preach revolt. But now that the Dutch had recovered from their setback, it was a fitting opportunity to begin operations. The Rupert was to be the point of attack, for the seamen of that vessel were already enraged at



being deprived of their old commander, in whom they had the utmost confidence and to whom they were deeply attached ; and there was little doubt but that they would blindly embrace any scheme to which the Duke of Richmond had lent his name. The fleet once in revolt, the city, in its alarm, would rapidly grow even more disaffected than it was, and would be only too eager to follow any leader that would promise it peace and safety.

And this leader Buckingham had determined to be. He had become connected with the plot through mere accident when smarting from some real or fancied slight put upon him. Thus do trifles in the most decisive manner sometimes influence the course of events, and lead to the most important actions of our lives. Once fully informed as to the purpose of the conspirators, the duke affected to be with them heart and soul, but it was only to further his own schemes and not theirs. Why, in case of an upheaval, should he not become the head of the commonwealth and eventually the founder of a new monarchy? For Buckingham had no sympathy with republican principles; he fully believed that, though aristocracies might crumble and be brushed away, aristocracy itself was eternal. Brilliant, profligate and unscrupulous, he had the most absolute faith in his own star

and his ambition was boundless. Entirely devoid of either gratitude or natural affection, he gave not a thought to the long and intimate friendship he had enjoyed with the king, or to the endless favors the latter had heaped upon him. He would have sacrificed Charles ruthlessly, if by so doing he could have obtained his own ends. It was to such a plot that Charles, Duke of Richmond, a truthful, honorable gentleman and a hitherto loyal subject of the crown, had, in a moment of madness, become pledged. It is doubtful if, in the days that followed, he realized much what he had done. True, he did attend one meeting of the conspirators, but he was in no condition to understand what was discussed or agreed upon. To drink and thus obtain forgetfulness was his one object in life now. A weakness, if you like, but a weakness which was, so to speak, the direct result of a strong nature. In glaring contrast to his sovereign, Richmond was not a man, when one woman proved faithless, to bask contentedly in the sunshine of the smiles of another. He could love but once, as he had loved, with the whole strength of his noble heart. There had been but one woman in the world to him, and all other women were as naught. Frances Stuart had been the anchor of his existence, and now that the cable which had bound him to her was

snapped, his life ship was drifting aimlessly amidst the reefs and shoals.

In all our passions there is something of disease, and so it was with Richmond. In his delirium he could not see clearly, and he was firmly convinced of his lady's faithlessness. He had no longer any confidence in her, and when disbelief becomes a faith, which sounds rather paradoxical, it is more stubborn and immovable than belief itself. Atheism is ever more bigoted than religion.

But if Richmond were miserable, what shall be said of Lady Frances? She could not seek oblivion as he had done, and she had naught but her pride to sustain her, and pride is a pretty poor quantity from which to draw one's daily bread. Possibly never in her life had she loved Richmond as she did now, even after he had openly insulted and reviled her. In one way, perhaps, this was but natural, for it is less from the pleasure experienced in the presence of the being loved than from the painful void caused by his or her absence that a real profound love can be recognized. All bitterness had fled from Lady Frances' heart, and with a generosity of which only a loving woman is capable, she reproached herself for having given the duke apparent reason for his unfounded suspicions. Still, no power on earth could in-

duce her to see him or speak to him again. She had said farewell to him forever, and forever it should be. Thus she thought, forgetting that the only eternal farewell between lovers is the one that is never spoken.

But the loss of her lover was not the only trial La Belle Stuart was called upon to endure in those days. The king, emboldened by her apparent encouragement in asking of him a favor, persecuted her more than ever with his attentions, which she could not entirely repulse. In her fear that the king might become suspicious again and visit his resentment in some terrible manner upon Richmond, she was forced to play a double part and act as patroness to more than one suit. This, of course, but increased the court gossip, and scandal was rife with her name and fair fame, a fact of which she could not be unaware and which was gall and wormwood to her proud spirit.

Chattering, idle tongues have done more to smirch spotless innocence than all the blandishments of libertines in the world. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* may be a good precept, but *all consideration for the living, for the dead only the truth*, is a better. Calumny can not hurt the dead, but the living may die of it.

Let it not be supposed, however, that Lady Frances, with all the tortures she was endur-

ing, gave any outward sign of her suffering. Her cheek might be a little paler than usual, perhaps, but her smile was as frequent, her manner as calm, sweet and gracious as ever. Hers was not a nature to wear her heart upon her sleeve and to pour forth her woes to an unsympathizing world. She, with her royal blood, was not a Du Barry to shriek upon the scaffold, but a De Rohan to die mute.

Strange to say, none of the tales anent the king and her favorite maid of honor had penetrated to the queen's ears. Either the poor, neglected wife lived so much in the privacy of her apartments that she was not likely to hear the gossip, or the scandal-mongers were ashamed to wag their scurrilous tongues in her presence.

Frances was thankful from the bottom of her heart that this was so, not only on her own account, but on account of the queen

What would become of the already unhappy woman if there should once enter her mind a suspicion of the only one in whom she could confide and to whom she could freely unburden her sorrows.

For some days the queen had been uneasy and restless, as if she had something on her mind which she hesitated to divulge.

Lady Frances was beginning to fear that

after all she had obtained some inkling of the odious stories that were circulating about the court, when her doubts were put to rest on that score at least.

“It is really very dull for you all here,” said the queen one morning, after their return from mass, to which Frances, although a Protestant, almost invariably accompanied her. The girl had been brought up in Paris—indeed, she spoke French better than her mother tongue—and consequently felt none of that horror of Catholicism which was shared by a large proportion of the English people at that time. It was, in fact, this violent antagonism to anything savoring of Popery that prevented Catharine of Braganza receiving that meed of sympathy which she otherwise probably would have received.

“It is really very dull for you all here, and you ought to have occasionally some amusement, instead of being cooped up here with me all day.”

This was said with a somewhat timid glance at Lady Frances, who, as she was the one apparently addressed, replied in all sincerity:

“I do not care for amusement, your majesty. But if these ladies,” indicating Mistresses Price and Jennings, who were also in the room, “find it dull, we might organize the masquerade that

was suggested the other day, with the dancers in the sets representing the different nations."

"Pshaw!" ejaculated the queen somewhat pettishly. "I did not mean anything so humdrum as that.

"No?" said Frances, as the queen paused as if for a reply.

"No. Why can we not go to the piazza of Covent Garden, or Spring Gardens?"

Lady Frances understood. The queen had not abandoned her idea of seeing one or more of those places of public resort which she knew her husband loved to frequent in disguise. She had, doubtless, been encouraged in her project also by those of the maids of honor who were young and giddy and longed for adventure.

Frances did her best to combat the plan, but her objections were overruled. The queen obstinately contended that they could be in no possible danger, as they would go masked, attended by one or two gentlemen of the court.

At last, to the evident satisfaction of Jennings and Price, it was arranged that they should undertake the expedition that very evening, Lady Frances, for the sake of her royal mistress, reluctantly consenting to accompany them.

## CHAPTER IX.

### LE ROI S'AMUSE.

**S**PRING Gardens, Vauxhall, was outside the city proper, on the other side of the river and nearly opposite Westminster. It was the favorite resort of the bucks and gallants of the time, and was really a very pretty place. As its name implied, it was a large tract of land laid out as a garden and hedged round with gooseberry, raspberry and rose bushes. The beds, some planted with flowers and some with vegetables, were all bordered with jonquils, gilliflowers or lilies. The turf was beautifully smooth, the walks were sanded, and the trees were trimmed into odd and fantastic shapes. In the middle of the garden were a clearing for dancing and a pavilion in which the fiddlers were stationed. Scattered all about through the shrubbery were little arbors furnished with tables and benches, at which were served ales, wines and cakes, as well as tea, which was just coming into fashion, was very expensive and



was generally imbibed in combination with strong drinks.

It was already dark; the lamps were twinkling among the trees, giving that chastened light so favorable to the soft murmurings of lovers, and the strings of the fiddles twanged, as the musicians tuned their instruments, preparatory to striking up a jig or coranto.

The waiters, or drawers as they were called, hurried hither and thither, taking the orders of the early comers or preparing for the speedy influx of guests, for on such a fine evening as this the number of visitors was sure to be large.

Although all the others were busy, there was one drawer who stood moodily apart, his back to a tree and his hands thrust into the pockets of his white apron. His broad-brimmed hat was pulled down over his eyes and the collar of his blouse was pulled up about his neck. But if one could have got a fair look at the face, it would have been seen that it was not that of a common servant, but the countenance of one of the most exquisite of the young gallants.

What could my lord Buckhurst be doing in London and disguised as a drawer, when he was supposed to be miles away on board the *Rupert*, repelling the attacks of the Dutch? The fact of the matter was that the young nobleman had arrived in town that morning,

having after the most strenuous exertions obtained a short leave of absence. The first piece of news that he heard was the unpalatable one of the change in Mistress Gwynne's situation. If he had been wise this should have been "ware hawk" to him and he would have done well to return at once to the fleet. But such a proceeding was not at all in accordance with Buckhurst's impetuous nature. He was wild with jealousy and disappointment, and he determined to see Nell once more, although he knew that his passion was hopeless. At the actress's residence he was informed by a lackey that his mistress was out, but whether this statement was true or not is more than open to question.

For the greater part of the day Buckhurst haunted the vicinity of Bloomsbury Square, but without being awarded the slightest glimpse of his inamorata. At last, toward nightfall, by dint of bribing the lackey, he obtained the information that Mistress Gwynne had ordered her coach for that evening to convey her to Spring Gardens. To that resort he therefore repaired, and, with the consent of the proprietor, who knew his lordship well and was accustomed to pranks of all descriptions, he borrowed the suit of a deaf and dumb drawer and took his place for that evening.

Buckhurst had a pretty shrewd suspicion that Nell had refused to see him, but he determined to obtain a word with her by stratagem, since open measures had failed. What he intended to effect he did not know himself; his only idea was to see her and speak to her.

The gardens were filling rapidly, but still no sign of her whom he had come to seek, when suddenly a laugh—a laugh that could issue but from one pair of lips—rang out on his ears; and, peering through the trees, he saw Nell come tripping toward him. With her were two gentlemen, Pepys and—yes, his unfortunate predecessor, the Duke of Richmond.

The little party entered one of the arbors and Pepys called lustily for wine.

Buckhurst drew his hat still further over his face and obeyed the summons.

“Wine! wine!” exclaimed Richmond, who had evidently been indulging too heavily. “Wine! the stirrer of sluggish pulses and the chaser of heavy thoughts. Wine, I say! Dost hear, sirrah?”

“Your pardon, your grace,” interposed Pepys, “but this is the deaf and dumb drawer. I know him by his hat and jerkyn. Permit me——”

He took the tablet which hung from the supposititious waiter’s belt and wrote the order,

Buckhurst glanced at the writing, nodded and retired. But, as he did so, a stray breeze blew back the flap of his hat, and Nell's quick eye caught a glimpse of the face beneath. An expression, half of amusement, half of vexation, gathered about her lips, but she said nothing to her companions of the discovery she had made.

"How fortunate it was I met you, Florimel," said Richmond, with a ghastly attempt at merriment. "I was mortal dull without you."

"I am afraid that you are mortal dull with me," retorted Nell, slyly. Her tender heart was aching for this unhappy duke, and, meeting him by chance, she had determined to make a martyr of herself in the almost vain hope of cheering him a little. "Ah! here is the wine, and canary, on my life!"

"Aye!" cried Richmond, taking a long draught. "Hail to the grape, which furnishes the only true Lethe. A song! a song! Music goes with wine."

"In public? Oh, no!" laughed Nell. "Let Master Pepys favor us. Come, my smug-faced Samuel, fling aside your hypocrisy for once and tell us your true sentiments."

Pepys, who was enjoying himself immensely, his only regret being that his beloved Knipp was not there, was nothing loath, and, in a by no

means unmusical voice, trolled forth the following verse :

“ When grim death doth take my breath  
He'll find me with companions merry;  
He'll find me drinking, drinking deep,  
Sing derry down, derry down, derry !  
Death we defy ! Pain comes not nigh  
While drinking, drinking, drinking !”

“ Bravo !” cried Nell, clapping her little hands in approbation. “ Who would have believed it of your sanctimoniousness ?”

“ 'Fore heaven, a good song, Master Pepys, and a true one,” exclaimed Richmond. “ Pain comes not nigh while drinking, drinking, drinking ! Your health, Master Pepys ! Mistress Ellen !”

“ Wait !” commanded Nell, with a swift glance at Buckhurst, who stood silently by. “ I'll give you a toast ! A toast to be drunk in silence ! To the health of the departed—Buckhurst.”

Buckhurst started so violently that a plate he held in his hand fell to the ground and was dashed into a thousand pieces.

“ Clumsy knave !” scolded Nell, in affected anger.

“ To Buckhurst ! The departed Buckhurst !”

“ To the memory of my lord Buckhurst !” added Pepys, solemnly, “ and may the sea bring

him wisdom, for he has a plentiful lack of it. A shallow man—shallow, shallow!”

Oh! good Master Pepys, you who pride yourself so on your policy, you have put your foot in it again. If you did but know it, your ears are nearer being slit than when you boasted of your intimacy with Nell's tiring room.

Nelly shook with a convulsive fit of laughter, at which Pepys smirked and bowed, thinking it a tribute to his own humor.

“Faith, Florimel, you're the merriest creature alive,” said Richmond. “You make a new man of me. Hark, the fiddles! A dance, a dance, and then to our wine again!”

“Go; and you, too, Master Pepys,” rejoined Nell, after a moment's hesitation. “I want to speak, or rather write, a few words to this man here; his wife is one of my pensioners. I will join you presently, my lord duke, and dance you such a coranto as will send the blood tingling like fire through your veins.”

“Don't delay, for my legs are itching to be at it,” and Richmond, with Pepys, walked away in the direction of the music.

Buckhurst knew he was discovered, even before Nell's ironical salutation of—

“Good day to you, my lord Buckhurst.”

Buckhurst dashed his hat impetuously upon the table. “Traitor!” he broke out, angrily.

"Tilly-vally, my lord," interposed Nell, composedly, making use of one of the king's favorite ejaculations, "no heroics an' you love me! We are not acting a tragedy."

"No," replied Buckhurst, quickly, "it is a comedy—a comedy of intrigue. Plague on you all! The memory of Buckhurst, eh! Zounds, my lady Nelly, but you shall have cause to remember him!"

"Indeed!"

"Ay, indeed! So you have graduated from stage to court since my departure! You change your lovers with facility. The latest fish in your net is that sea monster of constancy, my lord duke of Richmond. But the king shall know of it! ay, the king shall know of it!"

"And you would be the Mercury to bear him the tidings," said Nelly, just a trifle out of temper. "Do so, by all means, but it will be you who will suffer, not I. The king knows, or may know, all that I do. He allows me complete liberty of action."

Which was strictly true. Nell was entirely open and fearless in all her actions, as, indeed, there was no reason why she should not be, for she had nothing to conceal. "When a woman has need to be guarded she does not deserve the trouble," she said once to the king, and Charles,

who had complete confidence in her, acquiesced and let her go on her merry way as she pleased.

"But there," Nell continued, suddenly relaxing into a smile, and laying her hand in an almost pleading way upon Buckhurst's arm, "why need we quarrel? Come, come, my lord, you fancy yourself ill-used. Yes, fancy. Stop and ask yourself if it is not all fancy. Now smooth away those wrinkles. Cease thinking of senseless vengeance. We have always been good friends; let us be good friends still. Come, Harry, give me your hand."

A much more ill-natured man than Buckhurst, who certainly was anything but ill-natured, would have found it difficult to resist the frankness and good-humor of her tone and manner. He took the proffered hand and peace was restored.

It was a most distinguished company at Spring Gardens that evening, for many of the highest in the realm were there, aye, even *the* highest in the realm. For, when his subjects enjoyed themselves, why not the king? Moreover, who would recognize the handsome, débonair Charles in the rough sailor with straggling gray hair, a slouched hat and a patch over one eye?

With his majesty was his secretary, Chifinch, also muffled beyond recognition.



They had been strolling from group to group, apparently seeking for some one; but if so their search had as yet been unsuccessful.

“I fear you are mistaken, Chiffinch,” said the king, after a close scrutiny of a little party seated at one of the tables. “La Belle Stuart would not come hither. I know that Price and Jennings and Wells are given to gad-about tricks, but that the stately Lady Frances should join in such a frolic I can scarce believe. If she is here, however, I cannot fail to discover her, for, though of course she will be masked, that tell-tale mole upon her chin will disclose her identity.”

“I am certain that I am not mistaken, your majesty,” began Chiffinch.

“Take care,” interrupted the king, warningly. “Use no titles here. You may be overheard. Ah! there is a bevy of fair ones we have not seen before. We may have better luck with them.”

And better luck, if luck it could be called, they did have, for in one of the fair ones the king discovered the lady he was looking for.

At the prying, impertinent glances of the rough looking sailor, the queen in alarm seized Lady Frances’ arm.

“You were right,” she whispered. “We

have done wrong to venture into this place. Let us return."

Mistresses Jennings and Wells, however, did not share their royal mistress' opinion. They were delighted that some one should be rude to them, for there had been no sport in sitting mumchance and eating cakes at a table.

The attendant cavaliers, Etherege and Ogle, were on thorns at the insolent manner of the unprepossessing stranger. If any harm should come to the queen, their fortunes were marred forever.

"Your pardon, sir," said Ogle, stepping between the intruder and the ladies, "we would be private."

"Tush, man. Such a flock of vizards needs a better shepherd than you," was the bold response.

"How now, you saucy jack," exclaimed Etherege, drawing his sword. "Stand back or I'll break my rapier about your ears."

But before he could put his threat into execution he was plucked by the sleeve, and a voice which he recognized as that of Chiffinch muttered low in his ear:

"Have a care, Sir George. It is the king."

The point of the rapier was instantly lowered and Etherege would have knelt had not the king prevented him by a rapid gesture.

The ladies meanwhile stood huddled together, the giddy maids of honor rather enjoying the excitement, while Lady Frances was annoyed and the queen frightened. None of them had the least suspicion of the identity of the stranger.

“Let us go! Let us go!” whispered the queen to Frances. But before they could make a movement the ill-favored individual was close to them and was addressing them in a somewhat guttural voice:

“Your pardon, fair ladies; but seeing that you have not sufficient protection in this ill-mannered place, I venture to put my sword and myself at your command.”

Frances glanced about for Etherege and Ogle, but those gentlemen were deep in conversation with the maids of honor, and to her amazement and indignation had apparently left the queen and herself to extricate themselves.

This man must be got rid of at once, however; so, advancing a little, in order to shield the queen, Lady Frances said proudly and coldly:

“We accept no protection from strangers.”

“Strangers!” retorted the unknown, and there was something in the voice now, disguised as it was, that struck Lady Frances as strangely familiar. “Strangers! Perhaps I am

not such a stranger as you think. Nay, I know that black vizard intimately."

Lady Frances, to gain time, was forced to reply, although she was burning with anger at the neglect of those who should have protected them from such annoyance.

"The mask, perhaps, but not the wearer," she said.

"Are you so sure? Shall I guess?"

The queen, who was just behind Frances, grasped her hand beneath the cover of her domino, as if to say, "Should he discover us?"

"Fear nothing," whispered Frances, with a reassuring pressure, "this is no courtier."

But, low as the words were spoken, the king caught them.

"No courtier!" he retorted, repressing a laugh. "No! no more a courtier than you are court ladies. How could you be, indeed? The ladies of the court are too discreet to venture in such places. They take pattern after the queen and that paragon of virtue, La Belle Stuart."

Lady Frances started. This was becoming serious. Who could this man be? Did he know them? Before she could decide what to do, her tormentor continued:

"Courtier or not, you'll find me the most devoted of slaves, the most amusing of companions. I'll sing you the latest song, tell you the

story of the last new play, or give you the last bit of court gossip. The latter concerns that same Lady Frances. Listen, ladies, you'll find it most amusing—the pleasantest tale in life. 'Tis of how the king told his passion to the fair and frozen Frances——”

A low cry of horror and amazement rang out on the air, and the queen hurriedly withdrew her hand from the clasp in which it had lain.

“Sir, whoever you are, in pity's sake leave us!” implored Frances, in an agony of apprehension, and with a suspicion which was very near the truth gradually forming in her mind.

“Nay, madam,” replied the king, who, if he knew Lady Frances, had not the faintest idea who her companion was. “Nay, madam, if you are not interested in my story, this lady appears to be. Let her hear how the fair and frozen Frances preached him a sermon and laid before him his whole duty to his wife; how the wicked king was abashed and had a minute's mind to eschew gallantry and turn a good hum-drum husband.”

The queen again slipped her hand into that of Lady Frances. Thank Heaven, she at least had proved true.

“But the devil whispered a doubt if the Stuart were as cold as she seemed,” proceeded the king, drawing closer, and abandoning little

by little his assumed voice, "and insinuated that she followed her own diversions in secret. So the king watched and watched, and Satan watched, too, in the likeness of Will Chiffinch and led the king to a certain garden, where whom should he meet but this pink of purity, this statue of snow, this Diana in a laced petticoat, Lady Frances Stuart."

Lady Frances by this time was in an agony of fear and apprehension. She knew now who the story-teller was. How could she stop him? How could she prevent the queen hearing anything further? Suddenly, to her horror, the king grasped her arm and went on, rapidly and passionately, his hot breath fanning her cheek.

"The king accosted her,—she was masked and thought herself unknown,—and clasping her wrist with one hand, he flung his other arm about her waist."

As he spoke he suited the action to the word.

"Holy saints!" murmured the queen, staggering back faint and weak, while Lady Frances, struggling in the king's embrace, cried aloud for help.

Etherege, Ogle and Chiffinch involuntarily started forward, but the king fiercely ordered them back, and, straining the helpless Frances to his breast, pressed kiss after kiss upon the mole which had made the mask useless.

"I implore," pleaded Frances, desperately.  
"Your majesty——"

"So you have divined the truth. Yes, I am the king, who henceforth holds Frances Stuart as any other woman, save that he loves her more than any other woman in the world."

But what was this? A cry of anguish, a cry of despair, and in a voice that pierced the king's brain and restored him to his sober senses, rang out the words:

"No! No! Not before my face! Charles! Charles! my husband!"

And Lady Frances' companion, to whom Charles had paid but scanty attention, reeled and would have fallen had not Chiffinch sprang forward and caught her in his arms. The mask became unloosened and revealed to the king's horrified gaze the white, drawn countenance of his outraged wife.

"The Queen!"

Lady Frances tore off her own mask and faced him with blazing eyes.

"Ay, sir, the queen," she repeated, bitterly.  
"Oh! this was well done! You have stained a spotless honor and broken a loving heart."

To do the king justice, he was shocked beyond measure. Not for half his kingdom would he have had such a thing happen. All his better nature came to the fore. He seized

the queen's cold hands and chafed them in his own.

"Kate! Kate! my poor Kate!" he murmured. "How came she here? Would that I had known it! Kate, look up! Kate!"

But for once her ears were deaf to his voice. Pale, rigid, without consciousness, she lay in Chiffinch's arms.

With a groan, Charles turned to the others, who stood near by, hushed and horrified.

"Not a word of this, on your lives!" he commanded in a choked voice. "Her name must not be mentioned here. That pavilion is empty. Bear her in there! We will send for Pierce at once! Bear her in! Gently! gently!"

Into the pavilion they carried the poor woman, while Charles followed, racked with anxiety and shame. Lady Frances was left alone. How could she follow! Poor queen! Dear mistress! Would she ever dare to look upon her face again! Oh! what sort of a king was this who dared to trample upon all that came between him and his desires! And what would become of her? Who would ever believe now that Lady Frances Stuart, who had held her head so high, was innocent? And there was no one to defend her! No one! No one!

With a choking sob, she sank down upon a neighboring bench and covered her face with



her hands. Oh, Richmond! Richmond! Yes, he was right and she had been wrong. All feigning was a mistake and led only to worse ills. She would go to him; she would humble herself before him and ask his forgiveness, she would——

But at this point in her bitter reflections she was startled by the sound of voices and laughter. She rose to her feet, hastily readjusted her mask, and shrank into the shadows of the shrubbery.

From her retreat she peered between the leaves and saw coming toward her, with two male escorts, one on either side, a woman whose uncovered face she at once recognized as that of the chief actress of his majesty's playhouse. But who was that on her right? A fierce pang shot through Lady Frances' heart. Yes, it was Richmond! Richmond, evidently in liquor and with that woman! She was not ignorant of the excesses into which Richmond had plunged. How could she have been, living in that hot-bed of gossip and scandal, the court? To be a devotee of the winecup was bad enough, but to find consolation in this way was worse. Ah! he had not loved her as she had loved him or he never would have stooped so low! Humble herself before him! Ask his forgiveness now! Never! All was over! There was nothing left

to her now but pride, silence and a breaking heart.

Nell, Richmond and Pepys, who was the third of the party, sat down at a table near by, and Lady Frances could distinctly hear the actress' merry words.

"A fig for Jacob Hall, after that! Why, you have danced the breath out of my body! Order us some wine, sober Samuel."

"Ay," exclaimed Richmond, eagerly. "You are right, my Florimel! More wine! More wine!"

Even as he spoke, what was that noise that broke dully upon the ear? A low, far off, hollow boom.

"What's that?" cried Nell, starting in alarm.

Richmond started, too, but not from the same sensation.

Again the sound was repeated.

Richmond rose hastily.

"It sounds like distant firing," he said. "I will go and learn what it means."

"I like that man!" said Nell, emphatically, to Pepys. "He is not like most of your sex! He is constant. Eh, mercy on me! What is this!"

The exclamation was caused by the appearance of a poorly dressed figure, with gray hair

and a patch over the eye, which was descending the steps of the pavilion.

“He’s as old as the hills,” said Pepys.

“Yes, old as father Time. I’ll speak to him!” for the figure had now advanced close to them. “Ho! there! venerable father, where are your hour-glass and scythe?”

“You here, Nelly?” was the response in a well-known voice, which startled them both.

“Your majesty!”

“Yes, but say nothing. Master Pepys, I rely upon your discretion.”

And he passed hurriedly on, only to be stopped a few paces away by Lady Frances, who, in her anxiety as to the queen’s condition, emerged from her concealment.

“The queen, sire! How fares it with the queen?”

“Better, much better. She has recovered consciousness. It is nothing serious. But let me take you from this place. It befits you not to be here.”

But Lady Frances drew herself up proudly.

“As little as it befits your majesty. I will go alone.”

Once again came that heavy, ominous reverberation.

“What’s that?” exclaimed the king in surprise.

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth, when Richmond hurriedly returned and, in a voice which was easily heard by Lady Frances and the king, announced to Nell and Pepys that it was the roar of distant cannon, the Dutch guns.

All were struck with consternation. This was the first time that an enemy's guns had ever been heard in the capital.

"Oh! would I were a fireship to drive the Dutchman out of the waters!" exclaimed Nell, with fiery patriotism.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The muffled sound filled the king with anger and alarm and drove Richmond, in his excited state, half mad. De Ruyter in English waters and he not there? Ah! it was to her that he owed that! But, ship or no ship, he would hasten at once to the fleet.

"Good-bye, Nelly," he said, abruptly.

Nell looked up in surprise.

"What, already! The Dutch are not upon us yet. Well, if you will, you will, but we must have a parting health before you go."

"No!" retorted Richmond, shortly. "Those guns have sobered me. They ring the knell of England's honor in my ears."

As the king heard these words, he flushed hotly. But there was worse yet to come, far

worse. As if seized by a sudden impulse, Richmond snatched a beaker of wine and held it high in air.

“A health, did you say, my Florimel! Ay, I’ll give you a health!” he cried wildly, and then continued, his frenzy increasing with every word he uttered, and utterly oblivious of all Nell’s attempts to stop him. “Fill your glasses high, for I drink to the memory of a man, by birth a yeoman, but by soul an emperor. Raise your glasses high, dwarfs, for I drink to a giant. While he lived, no Dutchman swept our seas, no profligate women lorded it in high places. Drink, drink with reverence and honor to the memory of the Protector! Ay! the Protector! the Protector of every honest man and every chaste woman in the land; and the scourge of cowardly soldiers, cut-purse nobles and lascivious kings!”

He raised the glass to his lips and drained it to the dregs; then flinging it crashingly from him, he turned on his heel and rushed madly away. Nell and Pepys gazed at one another in horrified silence. This treason in the presence of the king! For his majesty was only a few steps away and must have heard it all.

Yes, his majesty had heard it all. Amaze-ment had held him rooted to the spot until Richmond had finished his impassioned tirade

and vanished. Then, with a savage imprecation, he hissed between his teeth :

“Such speeches as these lay the tongue that utters them in the dust!”

Lady Frances grasped his arm, and murmured through white trembling lips :

“Oh! heed him not, sire.— He is drunk, he is mad, and I am to blame for it!”

But before the king could reply, Chiffinch appeared, saying that the queen was quite recovered and had asked for his majesty.

Charles shook off Lady Frances' hand.

“Cromwell's health pledged in my presence! Ah! he shall dearly pay for this! Ay! with his life!”

And he was gone, leaving Lady Frances to digest his words as best she could. A hand, cold and unyielding as steel, seemed to grasp the poor girl's heart. The lights danced before her eyes, the music seemed far, far away.

“Good Master Chiffinch,” she said faintly, stretching out her hands like one groping in the dark, “take me home! take me home!”

## CHAPTER X.

### THE REIGNING FAVORITE.

“**G**AD’S my life, but this is scandalous!” exclaimed the king, abruptly entering the apartment where Nell Gwynne sat, idly strumming the lute and singing snatches of song for her own amusement.

“What is scandalous, Sire?” she asked, casting aside the instrument, and rising to receive her sovereign and lover.

Very pretty and girlish she looked, with her auburn curls falling about her bright young face. She wore a gown of white silk, brocaded with flowers and cut so as to display the soft whiteness of her beautifully moulded neck and arms. The robe was looped over a petticoat of pale blue quilted satin, from beneath which peeped a daintily shod foot.

The king was by no means blind to her beauty, as fresh and smiling as a May morning, and much of the irritation faded from his face as his eyes rested upon her.

Day by day, Nell’s ascendancy over the king

was increasing. She was a constant diversion to him because of her good spirits and the liveliness of her wit; her musical laughter delighted and her unswerving fidelity satisfied him. It was with the deepest sense of relief that he turned to her after the exactions and caprices of the Portsmouths and Castlemaines.

“What is scandalous, Sire?”

“See what was found attached to my door this morning,” and he tossed her a bit of paper with writing upon it. “Read that. There was a time when asses spoke; now they write.”

Nell unfolded the paper and read as follows:

“Here lies our sovereign lord the king,  
Whose word no man relies on,  
Who never said a foolish thing  
And never did a wise one.”

“I wish I knew who dared write it,” growled the king. “He should dearly rue it.”

Nell’s gray eyes were sparkling with merriment. She thoroughly appreciated the force and the truth of the mock epitaph, and she could not but be amused by it.

“It is the tomfoolery of that mad rogue, Rochester, my life on it,” she said, and then added, demurely: “But your majesty should not be angry at so flattering an effusion.”

“Flattering!” flinging himself down in a chair. “How so?”



“Do you not see the meaning hidden beneath the words? I gave your majesty credit for more wit. Why, there is no doubt about it. The writer intends to imply that your discourse is your own, but your actions are your ministry’s.”

The king laughed outright, his good humor entirely restored.

“’Fore Heaven, Nelly,” he said. “I believe you could find good in everything, and persuade me that my enemies are my friends.”

Nelly came and sat down beside him.

“There is one whom you consider your enemy that I would fain persuade your majesty was your friend at heart.”

“Of what could not those rosy lips persuade me?”

“Nay, your majesty, I am serious.”

“By my faith, a miracle! Nell Gwynne serious!”

“Yes, your majesty, for I have a petition to lay at your feet.”

“Now, this is more and more astonishing. You with a petition! I expect that from Portsmouth, but not from my pretty Nell. Well, what is it? It is granted, of course.”

Nell was silent a moment, and then, raising her eyes, half pleadingly, half timidly, to the king, she said seriously :

“I would ask the pardon of that poor, misguided nobleman, the Duke of Richmond.”

At mention of this name, Charles' face clouded over and he replied, brusquely :

“It is ill jesting on grave matters.”

But Nell was not to be put off. She was greatly interested in Richmond and his unhappy love affair, and she had set her heart upon obtaining from the king forgiveness of the duke's rash speech in Spring Gardens.

“Nay, I am not jesting,” she said, earnestly. “Oh! forgive him, sire! He meant not a word of what he said! I feel it! I know it! Think of his position,” she went on rapidly. “He loved his country, he was devoted to your majesty's person, when, suddenly, through no fault of his own, yes, through no fault of his own, he was disgraced from his command that it might be given to my lord Buckhurst. Think of what he felt when he heard those guns and he was not there. Thank Heaven, the Dutch have been repulsed, but they would never have come up so far again, had his grace of Richmond remained captain of the Rupert.”

The king was silent for a moment. He knew that much that Nelly said was true, and he had reproached himself before this for having too abruptly deprived a capable officer of his com-

mand, at a time too when the fleet was in sore need of capable officers.

“Still,” he said, thoughtfully, “that is no excuse for his drinking Cromwell’s health.”

“No excuse, sire,” replied Nell, quickly, “But his fault is not beyond pardon. It was the folly of a brain maddened by drink. In his sober senses he never would have been guilty of such a thing. Clemency is the prerogative of kings, your majesty, and even his enemies have never accused Charles of being lacking in generosity.”

“I have not defended my rights sufficiently, Nell, nor been severe enough when occasion required. But that was perhaps the result of laziness rather than generosity.”

“Be lazy now then, sire, and refuse to visit your displeasure upon Richmond.”

Charles smiled and Nell knew her cause was won.

“You are a spoiled child, Nelly, and I can refuse you nothing.”

“Then the duke is forgiven?”

“Ye—es.”

“And you will give him a new command?”

“Cormorant!”

“Will you? Ah! your majesty, a man of parts doomed to idleness is as severe a blow to his country as a lost battle.”

“Where did that little head learn so much wisdom? Ah! well. They all have their captains by favor. Why not you?”

In genuine delight at the success of her suit, Nell stooped and kissed the hand that rested upon the arm of the chair.

“Nay, sweetheart,” said Charles, with tender gallantry, “not the hand, but the lips. Here I am not the king, but Charles Stuart, a wearied man who comes here to find rest.”

“And it is not the king I love, but the man,” said Nell, softly.

“I know it! I know it! Ah! Nell, would there were more who were as sincere as you. Your playhouse poet was right when he wrote uneasy lies the head that wears a crown. My child, I am torn to death by the clamors of the people of England. What shall I do to please them?”

Nell glanced up at him from under her long lashes and then answered boldly :

“May it please your majesty, there is but one way left.”

“And what is that?”

“Dismiss your ladies, may it please your majesty, and mind your business.”

Charles started, but it was impossible to be angry with Nelly

“Odds fish, I believe you are half right,” he

said, with a laugh. "But if there were only some one whom I could trust with the execution of public affairs all would go well."

"Indeed, there is a good, honest, able man that I could name," replied Nell, with a sly twinkle in her eye, "whom if your majesty would employ and command to see things well executed, all things would be soon mended."

"Indeed, and who is that?" asked Charles, with some curiosity.

"One Charles Stuart, who now spends his time in employing his lips about the court and hath no other employment; but if you would give him *this* employment, he were the fittest man in the world to perform it."

Charles made a grimace at her and pinched her pretty cheek. He could not but swallow the pill, thus cleverly sugar coated as it was with flattery.

"Since you are so wise," he said, half jesting and half serious, "if you were in my place, what would you do first?"

Nelly leaned her curly head upon a hand which, for whiteness and delicacy of shape, would have done honor to the finest lady of quality.

"What would I do first?" she repeated reflectively. "Ah, that I know not. I was not

bred to the business. But I know of one thing that I would certainly do at some time."

"And that?" asked the king, amused and interested.

Nell's pretty face, usually so merry and laughing, grew very, very serious.

"It is an idea I have had in my head a long time," she said slowly, "a dream I long to see realized. All about the city are poor disabled sailors and soldiers who have fought your majesty's battles, and some of them by their age doubtless those of your majesty's father too. Everywhere you can see them without legs and without arms holding out their hands for charity."

"A most remarkable achievement, truly, Nell," remarked the king, slyly. "Men without arms holding out their hands, eh?"

"Tilly vally, you know what I mean," said Nelly, making a pretty *moue*, "I say it is a shame," she went on, paying no further attention to the interruption, "that old men who have fought at Edge Hill and Marston Moor, and younger ones who can show that they have bled at Naseby and Worcester,—where you were yourself, sire."

"Ay, I was there and ran away from Cromwell with all the rest of them," put in the king with grim humor.

“That is neither here nor there,” continued Nell, severely. “I say that it is a shame that those veterans, covered with wounds and glory, should be allowed to beg their bread in the streets and sink into their graves without a home to shelter them. I say it is a shame, nay, a sin, to let old sailors and soldiers carry about their scars as witnesses of their king’s forgetfulness. Is it not cruel that those who, for their king’s sake, have left some of their limbs in a strange country should have no resting-place for the limbs they have in their own?”

The king was serious enough now. The merry monarch’s sins toward his people were sins of omission rather than commission. He was careless and thoughtless enough, but not cruel or heartless, and a case of suffering or injustice was rarely brought to his notice that he did not make an effort to relieve the pain and right the injustice.

While the plague was at its height, he sent a thousand pounds a week for the relief of the destitute multitudes who were ill or had been turned out of work, and a thousand pounds a week is no mean gift even for a king.

“What would you have me do, Nell?” he asked, as Nell paused breathless.

Her cheeks flushed and her eyes kindled.

“What would I have you do?” she cried

excitedly. "I would have you do this, Charles! I would have you build a large, substantial, commodious, genteel looking house on some nice spot by the banks of the Thames, where the old sailors and soldiers could live happy and contented, where they should sit down to roast and boiled every day and plum pudding on a Sunday and an allowance for a little tobacco; ay, and a drop of grog too, to drink the health of his majesty, God bless him! for he would be blessed I know!"

The king took the pretty cheeks between his hands and looked into the brave eyes with something suspiciously like a tear trembling in his own.

"And Heaven bless you, my little Nelly," he said in a voice that shook just a little. "Would there were more like you! In your face there is an eternal sweetness, youth and air which never dwelt in any face but yours, and your character is like your face. Your dream shall be realized, my lass. The house shall be built, my old faithful soldiers shall be fed and clothed, and their scars shall be no longer a reproach to their king. Ay, and you, sweet Nelly, shall have the ordering of it all."

"You mean it? You will do this!"

"*Foi de roi!*"



And the king kept his word. For to this day the Royal Hospital of Chelsea stands, an enduring monument of the kindness of heart and tender, unselfish solicitude for others of Eleanor Gwynne, "the indiscreetest and wildest creature that ever was in a court."

## CHAPTER XI.

### NELL TO THE RESCUE!

THE truth of the old adage as to the turbulent course of true love was certainly most abundantly exemplified in Lady Frances' case. The road the poor girl was forced to travel those days was stony, rough and full of briars; for now she was not only called upon to bear the pangs of estrangement from her lover and the tortures of being placed in a false and shameful position, but there was the added agony of fear as to Richmond's probable fate. The words he had given utterance to in his mad fury were treason, treason to his country and his king, and there was nothing less likely than that the latter, under the circumstances, would pardon them. For a moment Lady Frances thought of going to Charles and interceding with him for the offender, but a little reflection convinced her that such a course would be worse than useless. It would awaken again all the king's slumbering suspicions, and would only be adding fuel to the flame.

Torn with anxiety she passed two forlorn, miserable days. When she went to inquire for the queen and tender her services, her majesty refused to see her, and although she felt this refusal keenly, it was not an unmixed grief, for it enabled her to hide her white face and haggard eyes in the privacy of her own apartment. All her pride was gone, her haughty spirit was bowed in the dust. She loved, and the man she loved was in danger. In presence of such a calamity what mattered all else? The indignities, the suspicions, the insults even to which she had been subjected sunk into insignificance and seemed petty enough now. She lived over again the past—her first meeting with Richmond at her ancestral home, the gradual dawning of her love amidst the hop gardens of Kent, the rapturous hour when she knew that that love was returned, the days of cloudless happiness that followed, the outbreak of the war and Richmond's departure to join the fleet, followed almost immediately by her summons to court as ward and kinsman of the king, the kindling of Charles' hateful passion, Richmond's return, and the ghastly succession of circumstances which had culminated in her present despair. She took out Richmond's letters, and with eyes which the scalding tears ever and anon blinded, read the lines so full of devotion.

Bitterly did she reproach herself that, misled by her fears, she had ever deviated in the slightest degree from the straight path of truth.

If she could but reverse the hour-glass of time, how differently she would act. With every moment of her despair, her love, overriding all else, grew stronger and stronger, until it took complete possession of her body and soul.

Oh, Jupiter, what are all thy thunderbolts ; oh, Minerva, what is all wisdom ; oh, Diana, what is all thy pride, when compared to the power of the frail bow and arrow of the little blind love god ! When touched by thy winged shaft, Cupid, the strongest, the wisest, the proudest fall helpless and vanquished.

When the morning of the third day dawned, Lady Frances could endure the suspense no longer, and she determined at all costs to know what Richmond's condition was, if he had been arrested on a charge of treason ; to see him if possible, speak to him, soothe his wounded spirit, bring him back to belief in her, respect for himself, force him to plead for the king's pardon, and make him once more the Richmond she had loved, loved still—the star of chivalry, the flower of manhood, the soul of honor.

In accordance with this idea, she muffled herself in a heavy cloak with a hood attached, and

thus proceeded, alone and unattended, to Richmond's house, which was only a short distance away. The servant who answered her summons informed her that his master was out, but had left word that he would return at twelve o'clock.

Richmond had not carried into execution his intention of joining the fleet, but had yielded in this respect to the pleadings of Nell Gwynne, who, resolved to use all her influence to obtain his pardon from the king, had sought him out the morning after his indiscreet outbreak and had finally wrung from him a promise to remain in London for at least three days. Richmond was somewhat influenced in giving this promise by the fact that the ominous sound which had so disturbed him in Spring Gardens had not been repeated during the night, and this augured well for the success of his countrymen. Later, also, he learned that the Dutch had once more been forced back to the mouth of the river.

As it wanted but a few minutes to the stroke of noon Lady Frances asked the servant, to whom she was known, to show her to the duke's study, at the same time warning him not to inform his master of her presence there.

When she found herself alone in the handsome, though somewhat sombrely furnished

room, she was suddenly seized with a qualm of something like horror at the bold step she had taken. For the first time it occurred to her that her action might be misread. Full of nervous anxiety she paced up and down, longing for and yet dreading Richmond's appearance. How slowly the seconds ticked forth from the tall timepiece in the corner. Presently her eye fell upon a carved desk which was open and littered with papers. Involuntarily she approached. Before her lay a packet of letters tied with a blue ribbon and a lock of hair, golden as the ripened corn. Her letters! and her hair! How well she remembered the day she had permitted him to sever the soft curl. It was the day he had departed to take command of the Rupert. He had kept it and her letters too! Perhaps he had been reading them at the very moment she was reading his. She snatched up the packet and pressed it to her lips. Had not his hand touched it?

But what was that noise outside? A coach! It was he! She hurriedly flung down the letters and flew to the window. Yes, a handsome carriage had stopped before the door. But who was this alighting? Not the duke, but a woman, a woman young and fair. Lady Frances' heart contracted with a spasm of jealousy as

she recognized her. What was this actress doing here?

She turned from the window in despair. What had that lackey said? That the duke had left word that he would return at twelve precisely. It was an appointment then. Oh, shame! shame! Hark, there were footsteps outside. Great Heavens! she was coming there! Lady Frances Stuart must not be discovered in the house of the Duke of Richmond by this play actress. Was there no escape? Like a hunted animal she looked wildly about her for some means of escape. At one end of the room was a sort of alcove, a place that had been used as an oratory by a former occupant of the house, and the duke on coming into possession had not disturbed it. The altar with its candles and crucifix was still there. The opening was draped with heavy velvet curtains which fell in thick folds to the floor. Behind one of these curtains Lady Frances darted, maddened at the thought that she was compelled to conceal herself, to hide her head before this woman of the theatre.

She was not a moment too soon, for scarcely was she in hiding, when a blithe voice was heard, exclaiming: "Less ceremony, my good man. I do not need your services. I can make my entrance without a call boy," and fresh,

bright and smiling, like a ray of sunshine, Nell Gwynne burst into the room.

"Humph!" she ejaculated, as she saw the study was empty, "he is late. That is scarcely courteous of his grace."

She drew up a chair by the fire and ensconcing herself within, prepared to make herself as comfortable as possible during the enforced period of waiting.

Lady Frances was on thorns. She did not dare to move for fear of being discovered, and behind that curtain she must remain, doomed perhaps to be an ear if not an eye witness of a love scene between Richmond and another.

But there was little of the lover in Richmond's tone and manner when he finally appeared.

"I am sorry to keep you waiting, Nell," he said in a dull, heavy voice.

Nelly gave him a quick glance. His face was pallid and wan, but he had not been drinking, at least that morning.

"What a solemn face," she said, gaily, "and for the love of the saints, man, don't call me Nell in those graveyard tones. I'm not the knell that summons thee to Heaven or—ahem! the region beneath the stage."

Richmond sighed wearily. He was in no mood for pleasantries.

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"I have kept my word," he said, flinging himself down in a chair. "The three days are up."

"You have been a good child," said Nell, nodding her curly head approvingly, "and deserve to be rewarded. You may follow your own inclinations now. Here, read that!" and drawing a paper from her pocket she tossed it into his lap.

Richmond opened it mechanically and proceeded to obey; but as he read on, and saw that the document was his reappointment as commander of the *Rupert* in place of Lord Buckhurst, who had been transferred to the Royal Monarch, a fierce joy lighted up his features.

"Nell!" he cried, breathlessly.

"Ah, that's better," she laughed. "That's a very different sort of Nell from the other."

"And you have done this!"

"Ay, and that's not all, although you don't deserve it. The king has pardoned your silly toast of the other night."

"The king? Does he know of it?"

"Why, you silly, he was there himself! He had come to Spring Gardens in disguise and heard every word. But like the good, kind, generous man he is, he has consented to forgive it."

To the woman listening eagerly behind the curtain this was good news indeed. In spite of her awkward position her heart seemed unburdened of a heavy weight. At all events, that danger was removed. To Richmond it meant much less. He had been in ignorance of the king's knowledge of what had taken place in Spring Gardens, and, moreover, he was well aware that he had become involved in a plot which, if it became known, would doom him to the scaffold. Still, he was commander of the Rupert once more, and it would go hard with him if a Dutchman's bullet did not save him from the guilt of treason yet. The path of honor was open to him once more! No more plotting and conspirators for him! He would die gloriously, fighting for his country and the throne he had signed a compact to destroy.

"How can I ever thank you," he cried to Nell, his eyes on fire with enthusiasm.

"Repent and sin no more!" was the solemn answer, delivered with all the gravity of a dissenting parson.

Richmond leaned over and took her hand.

"You are a good girl and I love you."

Nell glanced up at him demurely from under her long lashes.

"Love!" she repeated, pursing up her rosy

lips. "I doubt if you know how. He who loves Nelly must not be jealous. I could never endure gloomy eyes and a frowning brow. I love sport too much for that. Jealousy is not befitting a hero." She was looking straight at him now, and the next words were spoken very slowly and meaningly. "It drives him to mad courses, drink, dice, and disgraceful companions."

Richmond started. He was silent for a moment, and then he answered, the blood rising slowly into his cheeks:

"Then you know?"

"Why, bless your soul, of course I know! All the world knows that you are eating out your heart for the sake of that cold prude, La Belle Stuart."

The duke winced a little at the mention of that name, and then crushing between his hands the paper which he held, he exclaimed vehemently:

"Oh, cure me, Nelly, no matter how! Teach me to forget her, thinking of whom I forgot myself. I have been mad, I am mad. She is destroying me. Good, kind, honest Nelly, help me to root out of my heart her who is unworthy of any honest man's love."

"Humph!" said Nell meditatively. "Cure you! Well, perhaps. But before I physic you,

let me know the disease from which you are suffering. So you love the Stuart? Have you loved her long? Have you been true to her? Odds bodikins! What a question to ask a man! Of course you haven't.

But Richmond's tone was very serious and his expression very sad, as he replied slowly:

"She was the very sun of my existence. And now that that sun has set, the whole world is dark for me forevermore. My love for her ruled my whole existence. If I have resisted temptation and led a severe life, it was that she might have no occasion to blush for me. If I have sought honor in war, it was that she might be proud of my achievements. And see now to what that love has reduced me. Compare what I was once, when I believed in her as fanatics believe in their God, to what I am now—a rusted sword, a ship breaking upon the rocks, a duke drunken and worthless."

Nell looked at him curiously and sighed. She envied him for a moment as she thought half sadly that she could never love any one enough to allow him to make her miserable and ruin her life.

"Do not think of what you were," she said aloud, "nor of what you are, but of what you might be and what you are not. Come," blithely, "if I am to be your physician, you

must tell me all your symptoms, and any danger to which you have been exposed. What has the fair lady done that you should be in this terrible state of despair?"

"Done!" retorted Richmond, violently. "Is she not quoted in all mouths as the king's favorite, and——"

He stopped abruptly, for Nell had flushed to the very roots of her ruddy hair, and he suddenly remembered to whom he was speaking. He would have stammered forth some sort of apology, but Nell stopped him with a gentle—

"Never mind me! Well, what besides?"

"Seeing that I knew the truth, she influenced the king to rob me of my command, to disgrace me publicly and force me to rust here, a butt for the gibes and jests of the idle court. But," smoothing out the commission and putting it carefully away in the breast of his doublet, "thanks to you, sweet Nelly, her plans have come to naught."

"Hum! Well, what more?"

"What more?" repeated Richmond, in indignant surprise. "What more? Is not that enough? Her fair fame is soiled, her nature is corrupted until she hates me whom once she loved."

"The saints preserve us!" exclaimed Nell, lifting her hands in mock dismay, "how fast

you run on. Now listen to me," she continued more seriously, "and let us see if I cannot knock a little sense into that addleplate of yours. Oh! you men! you men! It takes a woman to understand another woman, and the way to do so is to put yourself in that other woman's place. Now let us apply the test. I am Lady Frances Stuart, though Heaven knows even on the stage I never undertook so difficult a part. You are my lover—well, I do not so wholly dislike that. The king woos me—ahem! Now, if I favor the king, you are in my way. So I say to the king: 'Here's an ass that loves me, but, luckily, he loves laurels, too. Make an admiral of him. Send him to sea and get him handsomely knocked on the head!' But say I favor you——"

"Well, what then?" eagerly asked Richmond, who had followed attentively every word she uttered.

"Why, then, my pupil, I keep you by my side for my own pleasure and thereby check to the king."

"Nelly!"

"What! Is daylight breaking in? Do you realize at last what an idiot you have been? Oh, well, I forgive you for it. You have had no experience in love-making, and you are something of a numbskull in knowledge of

the sex. But that old Rowley—and he has had enough experience with the women, Lord knows!—that old Rowley should have been gulled by her into taking away your command, that does amaze me. Well, it's lucky for you both that I am not a man. I would have whipped her away from under your very noses, you pair of nincompoops!"

While she was speaking Richmond's face became transfigured, and, as she ended with a burst of musical laughter, such a light shone upon it as might irradiate the features of one who, after suffering the tortures of hell, saw the gates of Paradise suddenly open before him.

"Nelly!" he gasped once again, unable to say more in the turmoil into which this revulsion of feeling had plunged him.

"Oh, you really believe now that your judgment is not as infallible as you thought," said Nell, with gentle satire. "Yes, almost anything is possible, even what is most unlikely. The skies may rain Burgundy, for instance, Portsmouth may turn virtuous or Nell Gwynne become a Puritan. All these things may happen, but one thing is certain—the woman who clipped your wings to keep you by her side loves you. There is no doubt about that!"

Richmond leaped impulsively to his feet.

The old fire had returned to his eyes, the old ring of hope and joy was in his voice. He was himself once more, the noble, honorable gentleman. The unworthy rôle of drunkard and gambler was cast from him forever.

Another good action to be recorded in your name, Nelly, to counterbalance the errors that were more the fault of the age than of your own sunny nature.

“May Heaven bless you for what you have done to me to-day,” exclaimed Richmond fervently, and his words found an echo in the heart of her who, pale and trembling, stood concealed behind the curtain only a few steps away. “What foul fiend led me to be so blind, and not to see the truth. Your words have carried conviction to my brain and heart. You have taught me a lesson. I believe in her! I love her once again!”

But, although his great grief had disappeared thus as if by magic, the consequences of his folly remained to be met. There still lurked one drop of poison in the cup of his joy.

Even as he was exulting in his recovered happiness, a servant entered with a note which was to call him down to the earth again.

“This from the Duke of Buckingham, your grace.”

Richmond started. He had forgotten for the



moment the plot to which he had so foolishly pledged himself. Oh! what a triple idiot he had been!

With a frown and an impatient gesture he took the note. Upon the outside was written: *Haste, post haste*, and inside were these words: *Your lackey tells me you are engaged. I await you below. Come to me on the instant. Our sky clouds.—Warehawk.* Richmond tore the paper into fragments and cast them into the fire. A conspirator! Oh, why did he ever plot? But now that his sweetheart was true, he would engage no further in the desperate business. He would see Buckingham and tell him so.

- “Your pardon, sweet mistress,” he said, turning to Nell, who had been watching him narrowly, and wondering what could be in that note that had caused such a change in his demeanour. “Your pardon, but the Duke of Buckingham awaits me. I must see him, but——”

“But you would come back and talk further of La Belle,” interrupted Nell, anticipating his thought. “Shall I await your return?”

“Pray do. It would be a crowning charity.”

Left alone, Nell rose and leaning one rounded elbow upon the carved mantel gazed down into the fire. The blazing logs upon the andirons

cast a ruddy glow upon her, making her auburn locks shine like burnished copper.

"I've lifted twenty years off that man's head," she thought.

And she, the other woman, her haughty ladyship! Ah! she would never know how much she owed to the greatest coquette in London. But if any one should tell her of it, what would she think of it? How would she act? And with her eyes fixed upon the glowing embers Nell fancied she could see her now, as with her queenly figure drawn up to its fullest extent, she extended coldly her white fingers, saying: "Here is your reward. You may kiss the Stuart's hand."

And then——

"Mistress Gwynne!" fell in low, faint accents upon her ears.

Nell, with a start, turned toward the place whence the voice seemed to proceed.

Was she dreaming? There before her stood the very woman of whom she had been thinking, but different, oh, so different to what she had pictured her. There was no pride in that humbly bowed head, no haughtiness in those white, tear-stained cheeks, no coldness in those trembling accents.

Nell's eyes grew round in amazement.

"The Stuart!" she murmured. "The Stuart, or—or her ghost!"

"It is I," came in faltering accents. "I, Frances Stuart. I was behind that curtain."

In an instant Nell was herself again. She realized that startling as the apparition was, it was flesh and blood she had to deal with, and no spirit. So, Lady Frances had been behind the curtain! Why, what the plague! Then she must have heard all.

"What!" and the tone and manner were quite calm and composed. "Did you hide yourself to listen?"

"Oh, no, madam," replied Lady Frances, simply, raising her great liquid eyes, in which there trembled something suspiciously like a tear. "I was awaiting my lord, when you came, and, fearing that you would expose me, I hid." And then, after a pause, very softly: "I did not know you then."

There was something inexpressibly touching in the gentleness of this queenly woman, who, from her stately dignity, had won at court the epithet of the frozen, and Nell's tender heart melted at once.

"Well, Lady Frances," she said, with a gulp, and an attempt at a laugh, which was like the ghost of Nell Gwynne's usual ringing laugh, "for once the proverb has proved false, you

listened and heard some good of yourself. Well—well, the best I can do now is to call my coach and leave you to the duke.”

But Lady Frances moved a step or two nearer, and with a slight gesture of protest, said reproachfully:

“What, before I have said one word to you?”

For once in her life, Nell Gwynne, with all her readiness and wit, was at a loss what to say or what to do. She would have had no difficulty had Lady Frances behaved as she had pictured her doing. She could have met coldness with coldness, arrogance with arrogance, for, when she chose, Nell could play the disdainful lady of quality with the best of them, but before this sweetness and gentleness she was entirely disconcerted.

“Ah, I understand,” said Lady Frances, sadly, as Nell remained persistently silent. “You think that I am ungrateful. You have heard that I am cold; yes, I am cold to the false-hearted, Mistress Gwynne. I live in a court, where truth is unknown. But you have showed me this day that there was a generous, an honest heart not a stone’s throw from Whitehall. What, you turn away from me? You lay me under so huge a debt and will not let me thank you? That is unkind—that is unlike you.”

“Why,” murmured Nell, too astonished to be conscious of what she was saying, “why, it is a woman like myself!”

“Of course it is,” replied Lady Frances heartily. “And what would you do if I had rendered you such a service as you have rendered me to-day?”

At this question, in spite of her emotion, Nell took heart o’ grace and managed to answer, with what was after all a poor attempt at merry bravado:

“What would I do? Something, I’ll be sworn, that Lady Frances Stuart would never do.”

“Well, what?”

“Faith, I should take the impudent jade round the neck and give her two great smacks on each cheek, ha! ha! ha!”

Lady Frances, with her lips smiling, but with the great tears trembling on her lashes, advanced, and throwing her arms around Nell, who could scarce believe the evidence of her senses, kissed her warmly, not only on the cheek, but on the lips as well. Then, overcome by all the varied emotions she had gone through, the poor lady broke down and, clinging to her companion, wept convulsively.

“Don’t cry! Don’t cry!” But Nell, by this time, was whimpering too. “There’s nothing

to cry about, save that I am not worthy of your kisses. Let me go! You forget who I am?"

But Lady Frances only embraced her more closely, and said, chokingly:

"Hush! Hush! I won't hear a word against you even from yourself!"

"Dear lady, I love you," murmured Nell, with a pathetic break in her sweet voice. "I would die to serve you!"

And sobbing together the two women lay in one another's arms—the maid-of-honor, with the proudest blood of the kingdom in her veins, and the child of the streets, with no blood at all to boast of.

And so Richmond found them when he returned from his interview with Buckingham. As Nell caught sight of him she attempted to release herself, but Lady Frances caught her firmly by the hand, and, with her lovely face still wet with tears, turned toward the duke, who stood mute and motionless with bewilderment.

"Yes, it is I!" and at the sound of the voice he loved so well, Richmond started as if suddenly awakened into life. "I was trying to find words to thank this good heart, but could not succeed. Oh! forgive me, Richmond, as I forgive you. How we have misunderstood each other."

“My own noble Frances!” exclaimed Richmond, passionately. “You ask me to forgive you—me, an infidel, who doubted the sun because a cloud came between me and its glorious presence. I——”

“Nay, it is I who am most to blame. To shield my lover, I stooped to deceive the king, and I did not deceive the king and I did my lover. Hereafter, Frances Stuart walks in the one safe path, the path of truth.”

“And I will prove my penitence by a life of trust and devotion.”

He opened his arms and in another moment Frances was folded close to his breast. As heart thus beat against heart, all suspicion, all doubt vanished like mist before the morning sun. They knew each other now, and once to know was to know forever.

After the first transports of the reunion had subsided, Richmond said to Nell, who was fur-  
tively wiping her eyes :

“May Heaven forever bless you for what you have done. We can never thank you.”

“No, that we can't,” added Frances, warmly. “I shall never forget in the happy future what I owe to Mistress Gwynne.”

The happy future! As Richmond heard these words, he suddenly remembered the danger that was hanging over his head. Buckingham had

come to tell him that a meeting was to be held that very night, when the time for the uprising would be fixed.

“Madman that I was!” he muttered. “Curses on my hot head!”

Lady Frances overheard the exclamation, but of course she did not attribute the words to their real cause.

“Nay, Richmond,” she said, hopefully, “forget the past. Look forward to the future, which seems so bright, so beautiful.”

“Heaven grant it may be so!” sighed the duke. And then, encircling with his arm the slender waist of his betrothed, he added wistfully and with exceeding tenderness: “It is not for myself I am anxious, but for you, my precious one, for you.”

At this—and perhaps aided by something she saw out of the window, through which she had been gazing—Nell’s brow, which for the last moment or two had been puckered as if in deep thought, suddenly smoothed itself out, and clapping her hands together the fair actress exclaimed exultantly:

“I have it! He is right, your ladyship, you are in danger, but be ruled by me, and I’ll set you out of shot of the king. You must promise to obey me, though, both of you!”



“You have a right to my obedience,” said Lady Frances, with a smile.

“And a still greater one to mine.”

Nelly’s cheeks were flushed and her eyes were dancing with excitement.

“Then you will be ruled by poor little Nelly, great folks, upon your honor?”

“Upon our honor!”

“Then, upon *my* honor, ere the day is ten minutes older you shall be married! Ay, married, as fast as priest and book can make you!”

## CHAPTER XII.

### HER GRACE OF RICHMOND.

**A**T this astounding declaration Lady Frances flushed scarlet, and the duke stared in blank amazement at Nell, who only laughed and nodded her curly head vehemently.

“My own, we have promised to obey,” said Richmond, when he had recovered a little from his astonishment, and finding the proposition, startling as it was, decidedly to his liking.

“Married!” stammered Lady Frances. “Now! Impossible!”

“Impossible!” echoed Nell, merrily. “Try it! You’ll find it easier to tie the knot than to undo it.”

“Consent, Frances,” pleaded Richmond, “and make me the happiest man in the world.”

“It is too sudden.”

“Would you sacrifice his happiness?” asked Nell. “I am quite serious. It is the only way to avoid unpleasantness of all sorts. Your husband can defend you, where your lover is

powerless. No! No! your ladyship, you have given me your word of honor and I shall hold you to it."

But still Lady Frances protested. Such haste was unheard of, unseemly. Besides, there was no one to stand by her, no one to give her away, no witnesses, no clergyman.

"I'll find them all," declared Nell, boldly; "any sober gentleman will serve to play the part of a father."

As she spoke, she ran back to the window, and looking out, exclaimed with an affected start, just as if the artful minx had not known it all the time:

"Why, there is good Master Pepys and his modest brother. How fortunate! Just in the nick of time! They will answer admirably."

She threw open the casement, and, thrusting out her head, called and beckoned Pepys to come up.

Although greatly surprised at the summons, Pepys signified his intention of obeying, and as soon as she saw the secretary and his brother entering the house, Nell withdrew her head and returned to the duke and Lady Frances.

The latter was greatly perturbed, and the duke was attempting to calm her and persuade her to agree to Nell's proposal.

"I am thoroughly convinced," he was say-

ing, "that it will be the best thing for us all. Mistress Gwynne is right. I must be in a position where I can defend you against unwelcome suitors and evil tongues."

"Of course I am right," broke in Nell, decidedly. "What, are you still obdurate? Oh! for shame, Lady Frances, when you promised so solemnly to obey me. And I am sure this poor fellow has suffered enough to deserve some recompense. Tilly-vally, you mean to marry him some day. So, why not to-day as well as any other?"

After a little more reasoning by Nell and a little more pleading by the duke, who, as was but natural, was even more eager to obtain the lady's consent, Lady Frances reluctantly agreed, provided that a proper clergyman could be found and that the marriage be kept secret for a time.

The duke was radiant with delight.

"Nelly, you've a heart of gold!" he exclaimed enthusiastically.

"Heart of a fiddle!" retorted Nell, flippantly. "But here is my smug-faced Samuel. Leave me to manage him. Away with you to the other end of the room. And stand firm, your grace! Don't let her change her mind, though to do so is a prerogative of my sex that I have always advocated."

"Have no fear," replied Richmond, as he obeyed and led the blushing Lady Frances over toward the curtained alcove.

In another moment a servant appeared.

"Master Samuel Pepys is without, your grace," said the man awkwardly, as if he were not quite sure whether he had done right to make the announcement or not. "He says that the—the lady called him from the window."

"Show him up, fellow," commanded Nell, assuming her grandest manner.

The man stared, bowed and disappeared. What could be the meaning of all this? That his staid master, who detested the sight of a petticoat, should receive visits from two ladies on the same day was bad enough, but that he should allow one of them, and that one a play-actress, to give his servants orders was worse, much worse. He would leave the duke's employ to-morrow.

"You called, fair Nell?" began Pepys as he entered the room with his usual pompous air. And then, as he caught sight of the two other occupants of the apartment, who were in suspiciously close proximity, his round face grew full of wonderment. With his keen scent for gossip and scandal, he felt that there was some mystery here which it behooved him to discover.

“The duke and Lady Frances Stuart together!” he said, turning to Nell, who had read his thoughts as easily as if he had given them utterance, and who kept a tantalizing silence.

“Strange! very strange,” he went on as Nell did not seem inclined immediately to enlighten him. “After the affront put upon him at the instance of the fair lady, I scarce expected to find the duke in such close converse with her. Indeed, as our sweet Will says, ‘’Tis strange, ’tis passing strange.’”

“There are stranger things yet for you to learn, my dear Samuel,” said Nell. And then, as Pepys pricked up his ears, she added abruptly and without further preamble: “This lady is to marry that gentleman and you are to give her away.”

“Indeed, ’tis a merry thing,” said Pepys, chuckling feebly. “Ever at your jests.”

“I am not jesting now, Master Pepys,” replied Nell, severely. “Indeed, it is the truth. Lady Frances Stuart is to become her grace of Richmond here, now, without delay, and as you are the most convenient man for the purpose, you are to act as father in the ceremony.”

“Nell!” he cried, in open mouthed amazement.

“Oh! Nell me no Nells! But prepare to be

useful and do a good action for once in your life.”

“Im—possible.”

And the wily, politic Samuel was really shocked at such a proposition being made to him. What, give *her* away, and to the duke of Richmond, a nobleman who was in disgrace at court? Preposterous! His majesty’s ward and a maid of honor was not to be given away like a bona roba at a Fleet marriage.

It was in vain that Nell by turns cajoled, flattered and threatened. He was firm in his refusal. He had his own advancement to think about, and, although Nelly’s influence with the king was great, he was confident that his majesty would never forgive one who should play the part of father at a secret marriage of La Belle Stuart.

“I will take no part in such mad doings,” he reiterated with determination.

Nell was at her wits’ ends. She was preparing to storm at him in true Billingsgate style, when suddenly there popped into her head a recollection of the leaves she had torn from his journal the night they had supped together at Lord Buckhurst’s. If she but had them now. Stay! This was the same petticoat she had worn that evening. She clapped her hand to her pocket and was rewarded by the crackle of

paper. She remembered now. She had read them through on her return to her lodgings (she smiled as she recalled what pretty reading it was) and had then returned them to her pocket for safe-keeping. Ah! here was a weapon that would force the perverse Samuel to dance to her piping.

“You will take no part in such mad doings?” she repeated, rejoicing to think of his speedy discomfiture. “Ah, say you so?”

“Nay, more,” boldly replied Pepys, whose fertile brain had conceived a scheme for earning the royal gratitude. “The king shall know of this.”

Nell slowly, very slowly, drew out the papers and held them before the astonished and then alarmed eyes of the worthy secretary. He recognized at once the leaves of his diary, which he had already missed and to his great discomfort of mind, for he could only conjecture what compromising statements they might contain.

Involuntarily he stretched out his hand to recover them, but Nell was too quick for him. In a trice she whipped the leaves out of his reach.

“Not so fast, my good Samuel, not so fast,” she exclaimed, triumphantly. “Stand farther off! Nay, farther still! There, that will do. I want you to be near enough to hear, although



I know your ears are trained to distinguish words at a great distance."

With the most irritating leisure, she smoothed out the papers and then, with a sweetness quite as exasperating to the anxious Samuel, she said:

"So, my good man, did you say the king should know of this? Very well, then the king shall know of *this*, also. Listen! *To Whitehall and there in the matted gallery m-m-m——. But, Lord, to see how the poor shallow king is fooled of them all, and what small respect he hath of himself* "

"Nay, Mistress Nelly," protested Pepys, nervously glancing about with a fear that some one might have overheard.

"*And has grown of late, methinks, marvelous ill-favored. His majesty will relish this.*"

Poor Pepys' teeth were absolutely chattering now. He realized fully the mischief such words could make. If the jade made public use of the leaves, farewell to all his hopes of greatness. There was nothing for him but to retire to the country and cultivate cabbages. His occupation at court and in the public offices would be gone.

"Prythee, for mercy's sake," he faltered.

But with deliberate cruelty his tormentress paid not the slightest attention to his prayer,

but, turning over a leaf or two, proceeded ruthlessly with her reading :

“*Thence to the Mulberry garden with Knipp, telling my wife, poor wretch! that I had business in the office. Mrs. Pepys will like that!*”

Oh, the world of derisive emphasis she threw into those last words. Nelly was enjoying herself thoroughly. Every writhe of the indiscreet diarist made her quiver with delight. This was more sport than any comedy she had ever acted in.

“Ah! here’s admirable reading for his highness: *The Duke of York*——”

But Pepys could endure no more. He was in the position of the frogs in the story, and he hastened to get out of the way of the stones as soon as possible. In other words, he capitulated bag and baggage, leaving the cunning actress complete mistress of the situation.

“Nay, nay, sweet Mistress Gwynne, hold!” he entreated piteously. “I pray you, no more. Give me those leaves and I will do your bidding in all things.”

He was answered by a peal of silvery laughter, a sort of *Io triumphe*, as Nell waved the papers victoriously above her head.

“So be it then,” she cried gaily. “Do my bidding and with a good grace. Tell the duke you will act as his prospective father-in-law.”

Pepys advanced to Richmond, with rage in his heart. Surely this wicked actress was his evil genius. She was forever getting him into scrapes. But he put the best face upon the matter he could, and saluting the duke and Lady Frances, he announced, as if he found it the most delightful office imaginable :

“Fair lady, my good lord, I esteem myself most happy to be thus trusted; dispose of my poor self as you will.”

“I thank you, Master Pepys,” replied the duke, pleasantly, “and shall not forget the service you thus render me.”

There was not much balm in this for Pepys’ wounded spirit. The duke’s influence at the present moment was *nil*, and, when the marriage he was about to make became known, it was not likely to be increased. Politic Samuel had but little sympathy for fallen greatness. His thoughts were all for those who basked in the sunshine of success.

“But the clergyman?” suggested Richmond, addressing Nell, who had followed Pepys to see how well he obeyed her commands.

Nell flashed a quick glance at her victim.

“Master Pepys, call brother John!” she ordered in a tone of authority that would not be denied. “Oh! no evasions, please. They

would be quite useless. I know he is outside. I saw him!"

Pepys hesitated.

"Alack-a-day!" he complained. "If the king comes to know of it, the boy will be ruined."

Nell plucked his sleeve, and, with a grimace of malicious glee, drew him a little aside. Then, in a voice low, but painfully distinct to the unfortunate man's tortured ears, she read again from the journal:

*"At the office, counting of my gains from the last prizes. The Lord forgive me!"*

There was no help for it. He was caught firmly in the toils, and must yield again.

"My brother waits without, and will be honored by this trust," he said to Richmond and hurried away to bring the young clergyman, thinking gloomily to himself, "He's a ruined youth."

As the door closed behind him, Nell gave full vent to her merriment, in which Richmond and Frances, in spite of the serious ceremony they were about to take part in, could not help joining.

"My poor, dear Samuel," she laughed. "how you must hate your pretty Nelly now!"

Now poor, dear Samuel, in spite of his inward tremors, was not the man to betray his humiliation and fears to the innocent country-

bred youth who looked upon his elder brother with a respect that was akin to awe.

“It is a great honor for you, John,” he said, impressively, after he had informed the young man of what was required of him, “Imagine it! You are to unite a duke and a maid of honor. It means great advancement for you, great advancement. And you owe it all to me, don’t forget that, John, all to me.”

So it was with the deepest gratitude and delight that the blushing youth appeared before the distinguished couple he was to have the honor of joining in the bonds of holy matrimony.

“Reverend sir,” said Nell, becoming suddenly serious, “has my good friend, your brother, informed you that you are to marry this gentleman to this lady?”

“Yes, madam,” replied John, modestly casting down his eyes, “and I will bind them as fast as e’er a bishop in the land. I have the rubric in my pocket.”

His quiet, unassuming manner quite won Nell’s heart, and she thereupon registered a vow that no harm should come to him for his share in that day’s work, if she could help it.

While she was thinking this, Samuel whispered eagerly in her ear:

“Now, give me the leaves.”

But he reckoned without his host if he thought for a moment that his cunning antagonist was to be caught in such a trap as that. She knew the old fox too well; so his demand met with a peremptory refusal.

“What! Before the knot is tied. Oh! no!”

Pepys sighed dolefully. There was no escape. But nevertheless, he managed to say to his brother:

“John, you are marvellously favored in this. Remember that it is all my doing.”

“I am deeply bounden to you, brother,” was the fervid response.

“Now, then, in with you, father and priest,” cried Nell, cheerily, holding back the curtain for the two Pepyses to pass into the oratory. Then, turning to the bride and groom, she motioned them to follow, saying: “I will remain here and be your sentinel.”

With a face radiant with happiness, Richmond held out his hand to Frances.

“Come,” he said, his voice tremulous with the emotion he could not wholly repress. “Oh, my beloved, was ever man so happy as I? And yet, perhaps I ought to bid you pause, reflect, ere you take this step. But how can I, Heaven help me! how can I!”

With one long look in which there was a

world of the deepest love, the most perfect confidence, Lady Frances laid her hand in his.

“It were in vain if you did,” she said firmly. “I would not desert you now. The hand that now takes yours throws down defiance to a king, but, if destruction now comes, it falls on us both together. Do you believe I love you now?”

Something rose in Richmond’s throat and choked him. He could not speak, but she needed no assurance. She knew and was content.

And so, hand in hand, the lovers entered the oratory to take upon themselves the most solemn vows that man and woman can pronounce.

Nell let the curtain fall behind them. With bowed head she listened to the impressive words of the holy contract. How solemn the lad’s voice sounded! Those were great words they were repeating now: “Through evil report and good report, for better, for worse, till death do us part!” May that day be far off! Heaven bless them both!

Poor Nelly! The thought that came to her then was a bitter one, a more bitter one perhaps than she had ever known. Never would she stand thus before a priest. The Church would never give her its blessing. No,

so sacred a union was not for such as she. She would live and die Nell Gwynne, and men would speak ill of her. Who would ever believe that her heart was not all corrupt?

“Oh, woe is me! woe is me!” she moaned beneath her breath. “Heaven pity me! Heaven help me!”

Any one of her merry companions who had chanced to see her then would have been surprised indeed. What, could this be Nell Gwynne, the blithe, romping madcap—this girl with the drooping figure, the sad, sad eyes and the mournful lips that quivered so pitifully?

None of her companions did see her, however, and the only man who happened to do so was too intent upon his own business to think of the strangeness of her expression, even had he chanced to notice it.

Major Wilding had entirely lost sight of his convert for several days. Going to Richmond’s house he had insisted upon seeing him, and, in spite of the protests of the lackey in waiting, he had made his way to the study, where the man said his master was, only to find it untenanted save for the pathetic figure of Nell Gwynne.

Striding over to her, he demanded with scant ceremony:



“The Duke of Richmond, madam! Where is he? I must see him.”

Nell turned upon the intruder a startled look. Who was he and what did he want?

The voice of the young clergyman, repeating the concluding words of the ceremony, was distinctly audible.

Wilding heard it and made a movement as if to pass through the arch, and before Nell could check him he had drawn aside the curtain, revealing the duke and the newly made duchess standing before the altar.

Dropping the curtain again, and staggering back as if he had been shot, he asked in a hoarse whisper:

“The duke and the Stuart! What does he with that woman?”

“Hush!” said Nell, gravely. “Man and wife!”

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE PLAGUE! THE PLAGUE!

**A**LL London was astir with life and gaiety. Triumphal arches were erected in all the notable thoroughfares, flags were flying and guns and music sounding everywhere. It was a day of rejoicing, for the Dutch war, which had been such a burden upon the people, was over and peace had been declared. Disaffection was at an end and on all sides were heard expressions of loyalty to the crown. To be sure, the terms of peace, although honorable, had not been very favorable to England, but this was a matter of secondary importance in the minds of the general public.

The only ones who did not share in the prevailing exultation were the uncompromising republicans, whom nothing could turn from the rigidity of their views, and the gentlemen of high degree, who, for one reason or another, had been led to join in the plot to dethrone the king and re-establish the commonwealth. All chance of the success of such a plot was now at

an end, at least for the present. For the conclusion of peace had rendered the government exceedingly popular and there was no possibility of an uprising now. While waiting for the most favorable opportunity the signal had been delayed from time to time until now it was too late.

Many of the conspirators were exceedingly uneasy and most bitterly regretted having pledged themselves to such an undertaking. Were the plot to be discovered, only a miracle could save some of the proudest noblemen in the land from losing their heads upon the scaffold or being sent into exile.

An additional source of anxiety to the leaders was the fact that Major Wilding, to whose care had been entrusted the documents signed in duplicate by the conspirators, had been missing for more than a fortnight and all efforts to discover his whereabouts had proved unavailing,

What could this mysterious absence mean? Had he been waylaid and robbed by highwaymen, or had he turned traitor and exposed the plot to the crown?

In any event there was serious cause for alarm, and there was more than one quaking heart amidst the pleasure seekers of London that day. Of all those who had been prominently concerned in the plot the only one

who preserved his equanimity was the Duke of Buckingham. That nobleman was as gay and debonair as ever, and externally, at all events, showed not the least trace of uneasiness. He was not a man to be caught napping, however, and probably he had taken precautions that no harm should come to him, whatever might befall his companions.

The great event of the day was to be a sort of tournament on Bandstead Downs, consisting of various trials of skill, strength and endurance, and to the Downs half the populace of the town were flocking.

A most brilliant scene it was, for not only was the king there, attended by his brother, the Duke of York, and half the dukes of the kingdom, but the queen and her ladies had likewise consented to grace the scene with their presence.

On all sides was a flutter of silk and velvet, the gay dresses of both men and women forming a dazzling kaleidoscope of all colors imaginable. The royal favorites were out in full force, and some of them did not escape the rough jeers of the crowd. The Duchess of Portsmouth, who was known to be a papist and was strongly suspected of being an envoy of the French king, came in for the greatest share of

the abuse and once narrowly escaped personal violence.

Nell Gwynne was there, too, but she was spared the scurrilous remarks addressed to the other ladies in the same state of preferment, for Madam Ellen, as she was generally known, was the idol of the public, both on and off the stage.

With her was Mistress Knipp of the Duke's Theatre and Samuel Pepys. The good man had long since recovered the missing leaves of his journal and to-day he was enjoying himself to the utmost, for was not his wife ill at home and Knipp in her pleasantest temper?

Amidst all the vast multitude, however, there was not one heart that beat higher with happiness than that of Lady Frances Stuart, for we shall continue to call her by that name although she had now a right to a loftier title.

The war was over, and to-morrow her husband would return from the Rupert, crowned with the laurels he had so justly won. Together they would confess the truth to the king and throw themselves upon his clemency. Since the unfortunate scene in Spring Gardens, the king had almost entirely ceased forcing his attentions upon her, and Lady Frances was beginning to hope that his passion had been an ephemeral thing which was now dying out.

Moreover, if this were not true, how, save by excluding them from court, which was no great hardship, could he injure herself or her husband? The days were gone by when an English monarch could imprison a man or send him to the scaffold for a mere whim. The laws now shielded Englishmen so long as they did not infringe them. Of course, Lady Frances was in blissful ignorance of Richmond's mad action in joining a conspiracy against his king. If she had known of this, her mind would scarcely have been so much at ease, but what the eye does not see the heart does not grieve for, and so she looked happily and confidently forward to the future.

The honeymoon had been very short, in fact there had been scarcely any honeymoon at all, for the very day after the hurried wedding, the duke had departed to resume command of his ship, and his wife had not seen him since. This was two months ago, but the enforced separation was now nearly at an end, and the war being over, there need be no further parting.

Two days after the wedding, Lady Frances, without asking leave or license, went boldly to the queen's withdrawing-room, and entering, without being announced, found her majesty

alone with no attendant save Winifred Price, who was reading to her.

The queen turned very white as she saw who the intruder was, and the maid of honor, in astonishment, paused in her occupation.

"Mistress Price," said Frances, calmly, "may I ask you to leave me alone a short time with her majesty?" Winifred was at a loss for a moment what to do, but as the queen said nothing, she finally rose and left the room.

As soon as the door closed, Frances threw herself down by the queen's side and took her hands in her own.

"Dear mistress," she said, softly, "it breaks my heart to have incurred your disfavor."

The queen's face was averted, and she made no reply.

"I have dared to brave your further displeasure," continued Frances, "by coming to you in spite of your refusal to see me. There must be no misunderstanding between you and me."

The queen made a movement as if to withdraw her hands, but Frances held them fast and would not release them.

"I trusted you," murmured Catharine, in trembling tones.

"And you may trust me still. How can you doubt me? After all, what have I done?"

“He—he loves you.”

“Loves me! No! It is a fancy, that is all. When you were taken ill, whom was it he thought of? You, and you alone. Could you have but heard the tone in which he cried My poor Kate! you would have been convinced that he is not indifferent.”

At this the poor woman turned eagerly with a rosy flush upon her cheeks. The least ray of hope was a joy to her heavy heart.

“I am sure,” continued Frances, truthfully, “that he bitterly regrets his words and actions.”

“But you? How can you fail——”

“Dear mistress, I understand. But because he is the one man in the world to you it does not follow that he is that to all other women. You heard what he said that night, and he did me but justice. Beside there—there is another.”

“Lady Frances!”

“That is not my name now,” replied Frances, blushing like a rose. “I am the Duchess of Richmond.”

And then she made a full confession to the astonished and no less delighted queen. When she had finished, Catharine kissed her rapturously.

“Thank Heaven,” she said, “that you have told me this. Oh! Frances, how I have missed



you! You don't know how I have pined for your true heart. But I will never doubt you again."

And then the two gossiped, laughed and cried together to their hearts' content, for woman's nature is the same all the world over, be it in palace or hovel.

So, peace was cemented, and Lady Frances returned to her position as confidant and favorite maid of honor, and, of course, was one of those to accompany the queen to Bandstead Downs on the day of the peace celebration.

The wrestling, quoit-throwing and grinning matches were over. The foot-race between a lackey of the Duke of Buckingham and a tyler, who was a famous runner, had been run and won by the former, thereby causing a large loss to the king and the Duke of York, who had bet three to one on the tyler.

And now came the bear-baiting, a diversion which had recently been revived. It was a villainous sport and one that had been held in peculiar detestation by the Puritans, though it must be confessed more on account of the pleasure it gave the spectators than the suffering it caused to the bear.

Lady Frances did not care to see this, and after asking the permission of the queen, who as a native of Portugal was accustomed to the idea

of even more brutal entertainments, she persuaded two of the gentlemen in waiting to accompany herself and Winifred Price in a stroll about the meadows until that part of the entertainment should be concluded.

It was a beautiful day in early summer and the grass was fresh and green and dotted with flowers. The little party left behind them the crowd and the two young women removed their masks and drank in long draughts of the pure fresh air.

Lady Frances was in the highest of spirits, and Winifred Price, who was not in the secret, was astonished at the way her usually sedate ladyship laughed and chattered, like the giddiest of the maids of honor.

One of the gentlemen with them was a young poet and dramatist named Otway, whose tragedy of Don Carlos had met with enormous success and brought him in large sums of money. The other was Sir George Etherege.

The conversation naturally turned upon the theatre.

"I did so enjoy your play, Mr. Otway," said Mistress Price, turning her big black eyes admiringly upon Otway, for the young fellow was exceedingly handsome, and the fair Winifred was a connoisseur in manly beauty, as indeed, from her vast experience, she ought to

have been. "Are we not soon again to be delighted with a product of your pen?"

"A new play is very shortly to be produced at the King's House," replied Otway.

"Oh, do tell us about it!" exclaimed Winifred, with another killing glance, which made Etherege scowl, for he was somewhat enamoured of the charms of the young lady, and, moreover, being a dramatist himself, it annoyed him to see so much interest taken in the work of a rival.

"It is a comedy this time," said Otway, who could not but be flattered at the undisguised admiration of the pretty maid of honor, "and it is called 'The Cheats of Scapin.'"

"Scapin," observed Lady Frances. "That sounds like Molière."

"Yes, and so it is. I have arranged it from one of Molière's comedies."

"It will be hard to find players to equal those of Paris."

And this was true enough, for two hundred years ago as well as to-day Paris was unrivaled in almost all the branches of art.

"Lacy is Scapin," replied Otway, "and Hart plays also, and of course Nell Gwynne. No comedy can hope to succeed without her."

Now it chanced that a few days before it had been mentioned in the presence of the actor

that it was rumored that Winifred Price had turned Papist and confessed all her love affairs, at which Nell had smiled and remarked: "What a wonderful memory!"

This retort had been repeated to Winifred and naturally had not been greatly relished by her. So, when the actress' name was mentioned, she turned up her pretty nose with an air of disdain.

"For my part," she said, scornfully, "I could never see anything to admire in that woman. On the stage she is coarse and shows the lowness of her origin, and off, I am sure, her actions are shocking. She should return to the part that most befits her—an orange wench!"

Scarcely were the words out of her mouth, when to her amazement, as well as that of the gentlemen, Lady Frances turned upon her with flashing eyes.

"Not a word against Mistress Gwynne in my presence! She has a heart of gold, and as to her actions, many of them at least might be imitated to advantage by ladies of rank and birth."

"Indeed!" said Mistress Price, biting her lip. "I crave your pardon, Lady Frances. I did not know that——"

But with a little cry, she broke off short. They had walked across the meadow and were close to a brook, beyond which was a

wood, intersected here and there with foot-paths. The cause of Mistress Price's dismay was the sudden appearance on the edge of this wood of a man and two women, who came hurrying toward them with every symptom of alarm.

As they came closer, the man was seen to be Samuel Pepys. His round face was pale with terror and he was puffing and blowing with his unwonted exertion. He did not stop, however, but screamed out, as he hurried on :

“Fly! Fly for your lives! The plague! The plague!”

With a shriek, Winifred Price gathered up her skirts, and set off at the top of her speed, followed by Otway and Etherege.

Lady Frances was about to imitate their example, when she noticed that one of the ladies who had been with Pepys had stumbled on the edge of the brook, and was striving to extricate herself from the slippery rushes. Frances hurried toward her, and, giving her her hand, assisted her to rise. As she did so she recognized the lady.

“Mistress Gwynne!”

“Lady Frances! Pardon me—Your grace!”

It was the first time that the two women had met since the memorable day at the Duke of Richmond's house.

“Lady Frances, we must not remain here. One stricken with the plague has escaped from his house. We were on the other side of the wood, and the people were flying in all directions. Ah! see! see!” as a figure emerged from the wood and staggered toward them, “he comes this way. Quick! let us save ourselves!”

Lady Frances seized Nell’s hand and started to run, but they had not taken two steps when the actress uttered a cry of pain and stopped short.

“Oh! I have wrenched my ankle. It is impossible for me to run. But go, Lady Frances, for the love of the saints, go!”

But not one inch would Frances budge. Never would she abandon in her need the woman through whose instrumentality she had been raised from misery to happiness. Besides, it was too late now, for the man was close upon them. A most pitiable and terrifying sight he was. His eyes were rolling in delirium, his thin, lantern-jawed face was haggard and white as that of a corpse, and his scanty garments were torn into shreds by his mad passage through the underbrush.

With wildly waving arms and uttering discordant shrieks he reeled forward only to fall prostrate almost at the very feet of the two terrified women. Lady Frances threw her arms

about Nell's slender waist and half carried, half dragged her out of reach of the touch of the infected unfortunate.

Nell gave one glance at him, and then said, in a horrified whisper :

“I know him. It is Major Wilding.”

And so, indeed, it was. The major had been stricken with the fell disease some weeks before, and had been taken to the pest house, from which he had managed to escape, and in his delirium had rushed aimlessly along, scattering dismay and terror in his wake.

“Ha! Ha! Ha!” yelled the poor wretch, rolling wildly upon the ground and tearing up the grass by handfuls. “The fiends fly from me! I have escaped them at last! Avaunt thee, Sathanas! I am strong—smite, smite, and spare not! The father's head fell; why not the son's? The papers! Where are the papers? Have we not all signed them? There are no traitors among us! No! no traitors!”

Each word was distinctly audible to Frances and Nelly as they stood clinging to one another in panic-stricken silence.

“Hark! Hark!” went on Wilding, his voice sometimes rising to a shriek, sometimes sinking almost to a whisper. “For God and the people! Down with the libertine king! How they scream and throw up their caps! Hush! Hush!

Not yet, good friends, not yet! The papers! I must see the papers safe first. Where is the duke? He does not come. I must see him! The duke! the papers! the duke!"

The sun was sinking, a golden ball in a sea of purple and crimson glory, and the trees threw their long shadows over the scene. It was very still. The games must be over, for no sound was borne on the quiet evening air from the Downs.

"I can walk now," whispered Nell. "Come!"

"Wait! One moment!" returned Lady Frances, in whose mind the ravings of Wilding had raised a suspicion. "Hush! He is speaking again!"

"It is growing dark—lights! Lights, there, I say! Ah! what fire is this—in my brain and in my heart? Water! water! for the love of Heaven, water! The papers! See them safe! Ah! a fiery hand has me by the throat! Water! I'm burning, burning! Water! The papers! Water! Water! Will no Christian bring me water?"

"Poor soul!" murmured Lady Frances, compassionately. "Wait! I will bring you water."

"Oh! no! no!" exclaimed Nell. "Not you! Let me go!"

But, before she could prevent her, Frances had hurried away to the brook. Removing her



hat, she tore off its broad brim, and filling the receptacle thus formed she returned to the stricken man's side and held the water to his lips.

Wilding raised himself painfully on one elbow, drank long and greedily, and then, with a shuddering sigh, sank back again upon the ground.

"And angels came and ministered unto him," he muttered, far more calmly than he had spoken heretofore. "The papers! Would that the papers were safe!"

As he spoke he fumbled with feeble fingers at the bosom of his shirt, and finally drew out a folded packet.

Lady Frances bent over him.

"Those papers lie heavy on your mind, she said, gently. "Are they of moment?"

He looked at her, but there was no recognition in his gaze.

"Ah," he gasped, "is it you, duke? Here, take them. They have all signed—all signed. The king's fate is sealed—ha! ha! ha! sealed. Take them! Take them, I say!"

Lady Frances mechanically obeyed.

"Ah! that is well!" he sighed, closing his eyes. "You have the papers—Heaven bless you!—I can sleep now——"

"Poor soul, he has fainted," said Nell, who had come close to Frances' side.

Frances was gazing at the packet she held in her hand with a troubled look.

"There was a fearful import in his broken words," she said. "What can these papers be?"

"Open them and see."

"He said the king's fate was sealed. Yes, I must know."

And unfolding one of the papers she glanced hurriedly over it. As she did so, she turned very pale.

"What is it?" asked Nell, quickly.

"Treason! A compact against the king. This is Heaven's work, and I am made the instrument to save him."

"A compact against the king!" cried Nell, in her turn paling. "There is no time to be lost. Quick, your ladyship! You must to the king at once."

"But you?" said Lady Frances, hesitating.

"Oh, never mind me. Go! Go at once!"

"I will send some one to you. You are right. This is serious and there must be no delay."

Left alone with the sick man, Nell sat down upon a stone to wait for the promised aid. Her foot was still painful, but she could have managed to hobble to the nearest house had it not

seemed to her cruel to leave Major Wilding alone and unattended. What could this plot be? Did it threaten the king's life? If so, God grant that the danger be averted! It did indeed seem like an act of Providence that the papers should have fallen into the hands they had.

“Mistress Gwynne!”

Nell gave a great start. Whose was this voice calling her name? She had been so absorbed in her reflections that she had almost forgotten Wilding, but now she became conscious that he had raised himself to a sitting posture and was looking at her with wondering eyes.

“Where am I?” he continued. “And, Mistress Gwynne, what are you doing here?”

He was no longer raving, but seemed perfectly rational.

“You have been very ill,” said Nell, gently, “and have wandered away from home. Keep still. Help will be here shortly.”

Wilding raised his hand and passed it slowly over his forehead. Then, as if suddenly remembering, he clutched his breast, and, not finding the papers there, he turned a terrible look upon Nell.

“Where are those papers?” he demanded

fiercely. "Did you take them—have you them? Speak, for the love of heaven!"

"There is no need of alarm," said Nell confidently. "The papers are safe."

"But where are they? Where are they?"

"In safe keeping. Lady Frances Stuart was here and you gave them to her. Seeing you so troubled about them, she read them and saw that they were treason, so, as you could not do so, she has taken them to the king herself."

With the roar of a wild beast deprived of its prey, Wilding leaped almost to his feet, and then his face turned a ghastly hue, and he fell heavily back again.

In alarm Nell sprang toward him.

"You are worse," she cried. "What is it?"

Wilding was breathing sterterously. He grasped his throat with both hands, as if trying to relieve himself. At last he managed to articulate painfully:

"She—has—struck—our—heads—from—our—shoulders."

"They were not for the king?"

"No! No! Mistress—Gwynne—you are—duke—Richmond's—friend."

"Yes! Yes! Speak."

"Compact—King's undoing—signed—Buckingham—myself—Richmond——"

Nell grew pale to the very lips and stared at

him with wide-open, horrified eyes. Richmond a traitor? Richmond sign a compact for the king's undoing? Oh, this was terrible.

“Warn—them.”

“I will! I will! - promise——”

“Heaven—bless——”

He gasped, struggling for utterance, but no words would come. Suddenly the jaw dropped, there was a convulsive twitching of the limbs and then all was still.

With a cry of horror, Nell recoiled.

Her cry was answered by the halloo of those whom Lady Frances had sent.

But so far as aid to Major Wilding was concerned, it was too late.

The fanatical conspirator was dead.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### A ROUT AT WHITEHALL.

IT was an evening of splendour at Whitehall. The festivities of the day had culminated in a grand rout given by the king, to which all the notables of the town had been bidden.

The matted gallery was lighted with hundreds of candles, and filled with a crowd of gallants and ladies whose gay court dresses made the whole place look like a vast flower garden.

The most famous singers of the day rendered songs of exquisite music and abominable words which both men and women applauded without a blush. There were a dozen tables of card players, the favorite games being basset and ombre, the latter a new importation from Paris, and the amounts staked were enormous.

Pepys was there of course. He never neglected an opportunity to bring himself into notice and pull the wires to work his own advancement. He was in his element, flitting from group to group, retailing the last

bit of scandal, and keeping his eyes and ears open to all that was going on. The story of the man with the plague was repeated again and again, and embellished with such wonderful variations that it was doubtful if Samuel himself, toward the end of the evening, could tell what was true and what was false in the recital. The only thorn in the good man's flesh was the presence of his wife, who had recovered with marvellous celerity from her recent illness, and under her lynx-eyed supervision, he dared not flirt with the court beauties as he would have liked.

The queen sat somewhat apart with two of her maids of honor, Price and Wells. Winifred had told her of what had occurred in the meadow, and although her majesty was somewhat worried at the non-appearance of Lady Frances, her attention was chiefly absorbed in watching the king, who lolled on a sort of ottoman, with Louise de Quérouaille, Duchess of Portsmouth, on one side and Barbara Palmer, Duchess of Cleveland, on the other, both ladies resplendent in gorgeous attire and glittering with jewels. The queen had long grown accustomed to the presence of the king's favorites at court, although when, soon after her arrival in England, she had been forced to receive Portsmouth, she had fainted from anger and shame.

About the king were clustered the brightest and wittiest men of the day, like Rochester, Buckingham and Sedley, for save in the management of public affairs, Charles would not tolerate about his person those who did not amuse him. The merry monarch was in his most jovial vein to-night and astonished even those who knew him best by the quickness of his conception, the brilliancy of his wit and the variety of his knowledge.

Our old friend Buckhurst was there too. He had returned from the fleet the day before, only too glad to be back in town once again, not that his duties on either the Rupert or the Royal Monarch had been very onerous, for on account of his ignorance of seamanship he had found it impossible to carry out his good resolutions, and so, following the example of the other "gentlemen captains," he had left the direction of his vessel entirely to his subordinates and spent his time in a round of revelry and amusement. He was looking remarkably well to-night in a handsome suit of green velvet, laced with silver, and, if appearances are any criterion, he had entirely recovered from his infatuation for Nell Gwynne, for he was conversing in the most animated manner with rosy-cheeked Mary Middleton. "Mary with the



locks of night," as he afterward called her in an ode composed in her honor.

The revelry was at its height when Lady Frances descended the broad flight of stairs that led into the gallery from the wing of the palace devoted to the use of the maids of honor. Marvellously lovely she looked in a bodice and train of amber satin over a petticoat of heavy white silk, richly embroidered in gold; but somehow her stately, high-bred ladyship, with her pure, proud face seemed strangely out of place in this heated atmosphere, amid the painted languishing beauties and the gallants with their foppish manners and unrestrained license of tongue.

Lady Frances, although she had made all haste, had been unable to reach Whitehall until the rout had begun. There was but one thing to be done; she must see the king that night and place in his hands the papers which had so fortunately come into her possession. So she dressed as quickly as possible, and hurried to join the revellers.

She had scarcely made her appearance than she was surrounded by a crowd of courtiers. She was still believed to stand the highest in royal favor and all were eager to do homage to the newly-risen star. Among those who fluttered about her were Pepys and Sir George Etherege, who were full of solicitude as to

how she had escaped from the danger which had threatened them during the afternoon.

Lady Frances gave them but scant satisfaction.

“If you had been a little more thoughtful when danger was near,” she said, with a disdainful curl of the lip she could not repress, “and a little less given to protestation now the danger is passed, I should be more likely to believe in your professed concern.”

Both gentlemen at this looked decidedly shame-faced, for they could not but feel that, in their alarm for their own persons, they had been anything but gallant.

“Ah! Lady Frances, would I had been there!” broke in Sir Thomas Ogle, who had long been waiting for an opportunity again to bring his suit to the notice of her whose will was supposed to be paramount with the king, and he fatuously supposed the present moment to be favorable to his purpose. “Had I been so happy as to come to your rescue, I might hope that a request I have to make would meet with your kind consideration, especially as it is for sweet charity’s sake.”

“That is a spell I must obey,” replied Frances, though with visible impatience.

“I entreat your good offices for a poor and

most deserving man," continued Sir Thomas Ogle in his most beseeching tones.

"What do you want for him?"

"Only a miserable thousand of the public money—the embassy to Venice."

"And who is the poor but deserving man you would have it for?"

"One Sir Thomas Ogle."

"Yourself!" said Lady Frances, with a sarcastic affectation of surprise.

"As deserving a man as I know and as out at elbows. I——"

"Nay," interrupted Lady Frances, with keen irony, "you need no advocate for your deserts, they speak for themselves; and, as for your poverty, your best vouchers are——"

"Who?"

"Your creditors."

This was somewhat severe, but Lady Frances' good nature was exhausted. This buzzing about her of the court flies was intolerable, and now that she was Richmond's wife, even though that was as yet a secret, she felt that it was doubly an insult.

Turning to Buckhurst, who had approached to pay her his respects, she said:

"Your hand, my lord. I would go to the queen."

And thus escorted she moved away, leaving

Ogle to bear as best he might the jests of his companions at his discomfiture.

As they slowly made their way across the room, Buckhurst, in the flowery manner which was the fashion of the day, murmured compliments upon her dress and appearance. But Lady Frances' thoughts were far away and she was evidently not listening to him, for she suddenly interrupted one of his most carefully turned phrases :

“My lord, I have a favor to ask of you.”

Somewhat surprised, Buckhurst replied with alacrity :

“You know, my fair patroness, I am yours to command.”

“Then, my lord, I beg you to obtain the king's ear at the earliest opportunity, and say to him that I would speak to him in private on a matter of the utmost importance. I will be in the anteroom at the west end of the gallery, and there await his majesty's coming.”

These were difficult words for Lady Frances to utter, for she knew full well what construction Buckhurst would put upon them ; but time pressed, and, at all costs, she must see the king without delay.

Whatever he may have thought, however, Buckhurst gave no outward sign of it, but

promised to fulfill the lady's behest immediately.

But if Buckhurst was surprised, Charles, when he was informed of Lady Frances' desire, was doubly so, and delighted as well. Could it mean that La Belle had melted at last? At all events, he would lose no time in obeying her and discovering the reason of her request.

Leaving those about him with but scant ceremony, he hastened to the anteroom, where he found Lady Frances awaiting him.

"Venus has issued her commands," he exclaimed, "and behold her devoted slave obeys."

"I thank you, sire," said Frances, quietly. "I would fain speak to you on a matter of the utmost importance, or I should not have ventured to be so importunate."

"Your will is my law, fair cousin," replied the king, gallantly, thinking meanwhile that surely there was not a woman in England that could compare to her in loveliness.

Lady Frances then proceeded to relate to him her adventure of the afternoon and ended by handing him the papers she had obtained from Wilding. Had she but read them through and seen one of the signatures at the end, she would have suffered death rather than thus place her husband's neck beneath the axe.

Charles took them sulkily enough. He had expected a love rendezvous, and not even the gravity of the information imparted to him could efface his disappointment.

He opened the papers, however, and after glancing at them hastily, thrust them into his pocket.

"But, sire—" began Lady Frances in surprised remonstrance.

"Odds fish, my fair coz," interrupted the king, "plots are no novelty to me. We will see to this to-morrow. It is a matter for Shaftesbury to look into. Pleasure to-night. Let business wait. When with you, how can I think of anything else? But why still so solemn? No more sour news, I hope?"

"Not for me, sire," replied Lady Frances, her heart beating a little faster. "I leave the court in two days."

"Leave the court in two days!" repeated the king in consternation. "How! Without our permission?"

"No, your majesty, I shall have your permission. I have her majesty's and you will hardly oppose our joint wishes in so light a matter."

"Light matter!" ejaculated the king, passionately. "Frances, would you rob my court of its star, my heart of its queen?"

"Sire, it is best we part," replied Lady Fran-

ces, with gentle gravity. "Scandalous tongues have been busy both with your credit and mine. I would not have our common name sullied either in your person or my own. I love your majesty as subjects should love their king, with honor and respect; I always would so love you; and that I may, I beseech you let me leave this place."

"Leave the court! No! No!" said the king, firmly, thinking it some caprice he could easily combat on the morrow. "But we will talk of this further at a more fitting time. Hark! They are beginning a minuet. Not one word more," as Frances attempted to speak, "I will forget all but pleasure for to-night. Come, we will dance together. Come, my Britannia!"

Lady Frances could not refuse, and in another moment they were treading the stately measures of the dance, Frances' mind by no means at rest as to the way his majesty had received her two important pieces of intelligence, and the king as carelessly gay as if plots and plotters had no existence.

## CHAPTER XV.

### CHECK TO THE KING.

**T**HE king's cabinet was on the second floor of the palace at the extreme end of one of the wings, and besides the door leading into the corridor, it had another means of egress and ingress, connecting with the garden by a long flight of steps. This latter was extremely convenient when Charles wished to receive some one without the knowledge of his gentlemen in waiting.

The cabinet was his majesty's favorite apartment, and well it might have been, for it was a delightful room, with broad, low windows, admitting a flood of light and sunshine. The walls were hung with gold leather, the window curtains were crimson silk embroidered in odd designs and the furniture was of magnificent old oak, black with age. Above the superbly carved fireplace, which was adorned with a pair of solid silver andirons, hung one of Hans Holbein's most exquisite Madonnas, secreted and saved at the time the vandal Roundheads or-



dered the destruction of all paintings representing the Virgin Mother or the infant Jesus.

Charles sat on one side of a long table covered with papers which were about to go before the Council and opposite him was the Lord Privy Seal.

Shaftesbury had not found the king as lazy and indifferent this morning as he usually was when public business was to be discussed. He was preoccupied, however, and his brow was dark and gloomy. Lady Frances' announcement of her intention to leave the court had been anything but agreeable to him and had aroused into full life again the passion which had slumbered since the unfortunate scene in Spring Gardens. He would not lose her without a struggle, however, and he had sent Chiffinch to command her presence before him that afternoon. In addition to this annoyance, he was troubled by the discovery of this plot. He had thrust the unwelcome knowledge from him the evening before, but action could be no longer deferred. For once the royal trifler was startled and was forced to look matters squarely in the face. When he first came to the throne, he had a father's murder to avenge, and he had raised a scaffold for that father's murderers. Since then, he had returned to his natural humor and been an easy sovereign, the tool of

intriguing men, the slave of still more intriguing women, till the name of King bade fair to become a laughing stock in England. He must rear the scaffold once more.

“Shaftesbury,” he exclaimed, suddenly lifting his head, and interrupting the Lord President in a long-winded discourse, not one word of which the king had heard. “Shaftesbury, let these matters rest for the present. You must prepare the Council for a grave matter to be laid before them to-day. Read that paper.”

As he spoke, he picked up a document which lay before him and handed it over to Shaftesbury. The latter unfolded it, without being much impressed by the king’s words, for he knew by experience that what seemed grave to his majesty was but too frequently of little moment in his own eyes and those of the Council. But as he read, his expression underwent a decided change, and he carefully perused the document twice.

“This is serious, indeed,” he said, at last. “Hum! this is treason, treason of the rankest sort. *A solemn league and compact to dethrone the king.* And signed—” Here he paused, and then raising his eyes and fixing them upon Charles, he asked slowly and impressively: “Has your majesty read these signatures?”

“Not I,” replied the king. “I knew myself too well. You read the names, my lord.”

Thus commanded, Shaftesbury began.

“The Lord Grey, of Wark——”

“Ah!” interrupted the king. “I refused him a place in the Exchequer. I meant it kindly, but he has taken it ill. Go on.”

“Roger Palmer, Earl of Castlemaine.”

This was the husband of the notorious Duchess of Cleveland, and to quiet him for his wife's dishonor, he had been granted an Earldom in Ireland and sent to that country.

“Ah! I have injured him,” observed Charles, thoughtfully. “He has a right to butt at me. Go on.”

“Major Wilding.”

“A fifth monarchy man,” with a scornful laugh. “The old leaven! He is a madman, and nothing worse. Go on.”

Shaftesbury hesitated.

“Go on! Why do you pause?”

“George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham.”

At this name Charles started violently, and the hand resting upon the table was clinched so tightly that the nails penetrated the flesh.

“My lord, it is impossible,” he exclaimed, in a low, shocked voice. “Do you mock me?”

“Nay, here is his hand and seal. Char——”

“One moment, my lord, one moment!” commanded Charles, with an effort.

There was an instant of painful silence, and when the king spoke again it was more in sorrow than in anger.

“This was mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted. Oh! who would be a king!” And then, mastering his emotion: “Proceed, my lord.”

“Charles Stuart, Duke of Richmond.”

This time the effect upon the king was electrical. He leaped from his chair, snatched the paper from Shaftesbury’s hand, and fairly gloated over the signature. Here was something for once to thank treason for. This presumptuous duke, who had drank Oliver’s health, and more, much more, who he strongly suspected was his successful rival with La Belle, was completely in his power at last. This time no supplications of Nell Gwynne or anyone else should save him.

“I’ve heard enough—more than enough,” he cried, casting the paper down upon the table. “To the Council, my lord. Open this black business in what fashion you will. I will but dress and follow you.”

“The papers, sire,” suggested Shaftesbury; “shall I take them?”

“No. Let the clerk fetch them. I would go

over the names. I can read them now. I know the best and the worst."

Shaftesbury bowed and retired to proceed to the council chamber, which was in the same corridor, while Charles entered his closet to make his toilet.

For five minutes or so the room was deserted, then the grating sound of a key turning in the lock was heard, the door giving upon the staircase which led to the garden was cautiously opened, and a woman peeped in.

Apparently satisfied that the coast was clear, she entered, closing the door behind her, and, throwing back her hood, revealed the bright visage of Nell Gwynne; not so bright as usual, however, for a shade of anxiety rested upon it.

All night long she had lain awake trying to devise some means to rescue the Duke of Richmond from the dangerous position in which his folly had placed him. At last she happened to think of the key to the king's cabinet, which Charles had given to her. She remembered, too, how careless he was, even with documents of moment. Might not that paper be lying upon his table, where anyone could take possession of it? It was worth looking into, at all events. If she could but once lay her hands on the proofs of the duke's treason she would destroy them, let the consequences be what they might. They

couldn't kill her for it, anyway, and, besides, she would swear that she had never seen them.

So, in accordance with this plan, she had come to Whitehall and stolen up the private staircase. Thus far fortune had favored her; she had managed to escape observation and the room was empty. Yes, there was the table littered with papers. Just as she had expected, everything in confusion! What a sad sloven he was!

She hurried over to the table, and commenced eagerly to examine the various documents. Expenses of the King's ducks. List of ships at Chatham. Project of the Canary Company. For the Council. A solemn league to—Ha! this was it! Heaven be thanked! She had found it and Richmond was saved. But how to destroy it?

As she thought this, her eye fell upon a lighted taper, which had been used by Shaftesbury for sealing purposes. This was the very thing! But just as she was about to apply the paper to the flame, she heard the creaking of a door behind her. Flinging down the document she turned hurriedly and confronted the king, who was just entering.

"Hey-day," exclaimed Charles. "Is it you, Nelly? A most agreeable surprise. But you look disturbed, child!"

“So do you!” retorted Nell boldly, perceiving that she had not been detected in her meddling. “What’s the matter?”

The king sighed heavily, and threw himself down in a chair.

“Nothing in especial; only a little more treason and ingratitude than usual.”

Nell threw off her cloak, and leaning over him, playfully attempted to smoothe the wrinkles from his brow.

“Ah, Nelly, this thing called a throne is but a seat of thorns. A king should have no friends.”

“A king like you cannot avoid making them.”

“Fair-weather friends, perhaps, or men who are your friends only so long as it is for their advantage to be so. In the duet called friendship, my lass, if both voices do not ring false, one always does.”

“Tush, your majesty is out of sorts this morning.”

“And with good reason, Nell. The kingdom is in sad disorder.”

“Not so great as this room, I trust. What! are there no women in the house to set matters to rights a little?”

The king smiled satirically, as he replied :

"There are women enough in this house, the Lord knows!"

"But not the sort of women to set things right, eh," said Nell, demurely. All the time she was thinking how she could obtain possession of that treasonable paper.

"And you will never be comfortable either in mind or body," she continued, "so long as you have Portsmouth and Cleveland about you."

"Hey-day! Hey-day!"

"It's true. They trade on your bad qualities and don't see your good ones. They deceive you, and leave you here in a slovenly room, and," with a sudden inspiration, "without even a fire to warm you, although the room is as cold as an audience in Lent."

"They gave me a fire, but it has gone out."

"Shall we light it again?" asked Nell eagerly.

"It is somewhat cold," said the king languidly. "I will order the rogues to light it."

"No! No!" protested Nelly, who now saw a way to effect what she desired. "Let us light it ourselves. Shouldn't you like to learn how to light a fire?"

"Well, yes, I think I should," laughed Charles. "Do you know how to light one, Nelly?"



“Nobody better! I have lighted hundreds.”

“With your eyes, Nelly?”

“No, Charles, with a farthing rushlight. But come, to work! to work! First, we must have some wood.”

She bustled about, and finding a broken cedar box in one corner, she ordered the king to chop it up with his sword. Charles, amused at her apparent nonsense, good-humoredly obeyed. Then she threw into the fireplace paper and chips, and lighting them with the taper, she made the king kneel down and blow it with the bellows.

While his back was thus turned toward her she managed adroitly to obtain possession of the dangerous paper.

“Blow harder! Harder, still!” she cried, cheerily. “Good sport, isn’t it? Don’t stop! Throw on some large wood! Now blow again, while I’ll put on some lighted paper, to draw the flames through. Blow! Blow!”

As she spoke she held the treasonable compact in the flame, and, running to the fireplace, knelt down by the king and thrust it under the blazing wood. As the flames shot up higher and higher she burst into a fit of hysterical laughter.

“Ha! Ha! Ha! That is the best fire I ever lighted! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!”

The king cast aside the bellows, and catching her about the waist, pinched her pretty cheek.

“What a mad, merry soul you are, Nell. Odds fish, I know not whether it is the fire or your airy ladyship, but the room seems strangely brighter.”

“And so it ought to be, Charles; so it ought to be,” was the merry response. “And now that it’s lighted, let’s sit by it.”

“With all my heart.”

So on the velvet hearth rug they settled themselves, the king and the actress side by side. Nell’s face was beaming and her heart light with the thought that she had saved a man’s life. She chatted away so gaily and wittily that the volatile monarch forgot all else save his charming companion, and the Council would not have seen him that day had not Will Chiffinch appeared to interrupt them.

“Well, what is it?” exclaimed Charles, impatiently, rising.

If Chiffinch was surprised to find his royal master in so undignified a position, he gave no outward sign of his astonishment, but replied gravely :

“The Clerk of the Council, your Majesty!”

“Oh! hang the Clerk of the Council!” ejaculated the king.

“He comes after the papers for my Lords, sire.”

“Oh! Well, here they are. Give them to him.”

And he gathered up the papers on the table, and handed them to the secretary.

“Thank Heaven! Just in time!” thought Nell, exultingly.

“Lord Shaftesbury begs your majesty’s presence at the Council,” said Chiffinch, as he took the documents.

“Odds fish,” exclaimed Charles, angrily. “Am I to have no time that I can call my own? I’ll not to the Council to-day. And so inform my lord Shaftesbury.”

Chiffinch bowed and retired.

“The impudent knave!” said the king, turning to Nell. “But let us forget it, sweetheart. What should I do without you, Nelly, with your frank and sunny temper? I am sick of hypocrisy and I love you because you are yourself, my lass.”

Honest Nelly winced a little at this, when she thought how she had just deluded him, but she vowed in her heart that it should be the only time.

“Feigning hearts and false, smooth faces have tortured me to death,” continued the king, feasting his eyes on the winsome face

before him. "Your open brow, without mask or veil, has comfort for me. I come to it like a desert traveler to fresh, clear water."

"Faith, Charles," replied Nell, smiling, "if that were in rhyme now, it were worth a round from the pit. But," and her face grew grave and she held up one tapering finger reprovingly, "is this the way you obey me? Has all my lecturing been so soon forgot?"

"What do you mean?"

"What has become of the good, honest man I advised you to employ to look after the public business. No! No! sire, you must not stay idling here with me when the Council demands your presence."

"They will demand in vain to-day," replied Charles, comfortably settling himself in an arm-chair.

At this, Nelly caught up her cloak and hurried away toward the door. This tête-à-tête was quite as pleasant for her as it was for Charles, but she had long since determined that no one should with justice reproach her with causing the king to neglect his duty.

"Nell! Nell!" called Charles. "Where are you going?"

Nell glanced back at him over her shoulder.

"As fast as I can to hell," she replied, with startling distinctness.

“And why with such speed to hell?” asked the king in astonishment.

“That I may fetch Oliver Cromwell hence, for he will have some care for the nation, and your majesty has none!”

The good-natured Charles laughed heartily, but the joke worked its effect. Yawning wearily, he rose from his chair and proceeded slowly to the council chamber, having first exacted a promise from the daring madcap to remain in the cabinet until his return.

Nell, for more reasons than one, was nothing loath to give this promise.

Left alone, she began to feel a little alarmed at what she had done. What would happen when the paper was discovered to be missing? Moreover—and this had not occurred to her before—might not the destruction of the paper work ill to the king? There were other plotters beside Richmond, and might not they continue their nefarious designs? If this had occurred to her before it is very doubtful if she would have lighted that fire. To save the duke was one thing, but to bring injury to the king was quite another.

She was startled from her unpleasant reflections by the sound of footsteps in the corridor just outside the door. Some one was coming to the cabinet. In an instant she jumped to her

feet and, flying across the room, popped into the king's closet.

Scarcely had she disappeared when Chiffinch entered, ushering in the Duke of Richmond and Lady Frances.

"His majesty begged me to request your ladyship to remain until his return from the Council," said Chiffinch, and then left husband and wife alone together.

"My Frances," exclaimed Richmond, throwing his arm about her, "at last you are to take your leave of this corrupt court."

"But, Richmond," began Frances, and then she paused, hesitating to proceed further.

"But what, my dearest? We are one, now, and henceforth must have no secrets from each other."

"Alas!" said Frances, tremulously, "I am a woman and therefore a coward. Forgive me, my own love, but why let any one know of our happiness until we are out of reach of all these malicious tongues?"

Richmond smiled as he glanced down at the lovely face so close to his own, but his answer was firm and decided:

"Not so, my own. Be true to yourself. Stand by me as I tell the king the truth, and tell him, too, that the husband of Frances Stuart must either serve his country and his

king in some honorable post or live with you a loving and a quiet life at home."

At these words, all Frances' courage returned, and raising her eyes to his, she answered :

"Richmond, you are better than I am. You are more fearless, and therefore you are more true. Oh! take me away from this stifling atmosphere of lies! Take me anywhere where truth is! I love you, my honest sailor. I would be worthy of you." She raised her white arms, threw them about his neck, and continued, passionately! "No more equivocation! No more disguise! We are English, we are noble, we are one! We will defy this king together!"

In a paroxysm of happiness Richmond crushed her almost fiercely to his breast, but before he could utter a syllable in reply, there fell upon his ears, in cold, measured accents, the words:

"Defy this king together! You will need all your courage, mistress!"

With a startled cry Frances sprang from Richmond's embrace, and moved by one impulse, they both turned toward the spot whence the voice proceeded.

There, upon the threshold, stood the king, his arms folded, his brow black as night and his eyes blazing with anger.

## CHAPTER XVI.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

WHEN the king reached the council-chamber he found that the paper revealing the existence of the compact was not among the other documents, and, thinking that he had mislaid it, he returned himself to the cabinet to search for it, and, so doing, surprised Lady Frances in Richmond's arms.

The duke was the first to regain his composure. Uncovering his head in the presence of his sovereign, he took Lady Frances' hand and advanced to confess all, but, before he could utter a word, Charles checked him with an angry gesture.

"Unhand that lady," he thundered, "or by Heaven, I will lay aside the king, and face my rival, man to man! 'Sdeath, madam," turning to Frances, "do you bring your lover into my very closet? Would you show yourself without shame as well as without gratitude?"

But Lady Frances' blood was up, and she was not to be dictated to or intimidated by any



one, even were he ten times king of England. She faced Charles like an insulted Juno, her superb figure drawn up to its full height and her blue eyes blazing with the indignation she made no effort to conceal.

“And since when have I forfeited a woman’s right to choose whom she will love?” she demanded, haughtily. “Am I the first English girl who has preferred an honorable suit to one which, although a king’s, was all insult? Yes, sire, know that I love the Duke of Richmond, and I claim a free-born English woman’s right to bestow my hand and heart on the man I choose. This is the man I love, and his I am till death do us part!”

This was defiance with a vengeance. The mask was off at last, and Frances exulted in her release from duplicity.

The king was furious, but knowing that it was in his power to punish this presumptuous duke and to bring this arrogant lady to his feet, he controlled his temper. There was a steely glitter in his eyes, however, and an icy menace in his voice, as he replied:

“Till death do you part, say you? That may be sooner than you think, disloyal lady.”

“Idle threats, your majesty,” retorted Frances, with a scornful curl of her lip. “I am not

a child, or disloyal, as you well know. I am more true to you than you are to yourself."

"Say you so? I shall answer you better when I find a certain paper."

Could this be the merry, careless Charles who was speaking, this cold, calm man with the stern brow and the grim smile about the lips? In spite of all her bravery Frances felt her heart contract with a nameless terror, and she involuntarily drew a little closer to Richmond, who had been a grave, silent spectator of the previous scene. The king advanced to the table and began searching among the papers scattered upon it.

Nell Gwynne, who, peeping through the slightly opened door of the king's closet, had been an eager listener of all that had taken place, almost laughed aloud as she saw Charles turning over paper after paper in his vain quest.

"Find it if you can!" she thought, triumphantly. "What is left of it is up the chimney!"

"Curses upon it," muttered the king. "It is gone. Treason sits upon my very footstool, but this time she is foiled. The paper was in duplicate, and here is the duplicate."

As he spoke, he opened the drawer of the table and drew forth a folded document.

“Lost! Lost!” thought Nell in despair, clutching the side of the door.

Up to this moment Richmond had had no suspicion of the revelation about to take place, but, as he saw the paper in the king’s hands, like a flash he understood the horrible position in which he was placed. Not only had his madness ruined himself beyond redemption, but it would bring the bitterest shame and grief upon that head he would gladly have died to shield. A ghastly pallor showed itself beneath the bronze of his face, and he pressed his lips tightly together to stifle the cry of agony that rose up from his heart.

Frances, who was watching the king, saw nothing of the change in the duke, and to Charles’ question of whether she knew what the document was, she replied calmly and unsuspectingly :

“Yes, sire, the papers I gave your majesty last night. I thought not of danger when I took them from a plague-spotted hand to give them to you. You should not have called me disloyal.”

The king smiled, somewhat satirically.

“Your rebuke is just,” he said. “If rather cold-blooded, you are certainly loyal, and it is for that reason I am about to put a question to you.” He paused, and fixing his eyes in

cold triumph upon Richmond's white, drawn face, continued slowly and distinctly, still addressing the unsuspecting Frances: "What does the man deserve, who, being my soldier, yet fights against me; who, drawing honor from me, yet aims at my throne and life?"

Promptly and clearly the answer came, ringing in Richmond's ears like a sentence to execution.

"He deserves death."

"But, say this man was a nobleman?"

"Then he deserves to die twice: once for attacking his king, once for dishonoring his own order."

There was something satanic in the gleam that shone upon the king's countenance. His triumph was complete. Surely never was vengeance more exquisite than this.

"You say well. Your own lips have condemned him," he said, with ghastly humor. "Read!" and he placed the paper in her hands. "No, this name will be enough."

Lady Frances' eyes followed the direction of his finger and read in letters of fire which seemed to burn into her brain the name: Charles Stuart, Duke of Richmond.

Slowly the blood receded from her face, leaving her white as marble, a convulsive shudder

shook her whole frame, and the paper fell fluttering to the floor from her nerveless grasp.

With eyes in which there dwelt an agony of horror and despair, she gazed first at the king and then at Richmond, who stood with bent head and downcast eyes, as in silent confession of his guilt.

Something very like pity stirred at the king's heart, but he thrust it violently away from him.

"Duke of Richmond," he said, with chill gravity, "this lady's hand gave me the proofs of your guilt, her tongue has pronounced your doom—the scaffold. You love Cromwell? To Cromwell you shall go."

As if from an immeasurable distance, these words fell upon the ears of the forlorn and miserable Frances. She could not move, she could not speak. Her limbs seemed weighed down with chains, her heart encased in a block of ice. And then she became conscious that Richmond was speaking.

"I was mad, sire," he said, in low, dull tones. "This lady has but done her duty, and I bow to my sentence. Fool that I was, my doubts of her ruined me."

He turned toward Frances, and after a pause uttered but one word, her name, but in that one word was such a world of despairing love, of tortured entreaty for forgiveness that, as if by

magic, all Frances' lethargy fell from her. She awoke to a full realization of her misery, and, stretching out her hands to the king, the master of her destiny, she moaned :

“Mercy, sire, mercy !”

“Mercy for *him*. You——”

“No! No! not for him! for *me!*” interrupted Frances, forgetting all save the shadow of the axe which hovered over the man she loved.

“Oh, spare my life. It is bound up in his.”

“You were warned.”

“I was. I know! I know! Oh, I have been much to blame. Forgive me! He loved you so; he was so faithful, so zealous a subject, until we drove him to despair.”

The king stooped and picked up the paper from the floor.

“Idle words, your ladyship,” he said. “Here is his handwriting.”

“No! No! here is his true handwriting,” cried Frances eagerly, drawing with trembling fingers a letter from its resting place under the laces which covered her bosom. “See, sire, his letter written from sea, scarce three months ago. Read it, I implore you. Read it, it may soften your heart toward us.”

Hesitatingly, the king took the letter which Lady Frances thrust upon him, and, in a cold, monotonous voice, read as follows :

*“Sweetheart, I write with the Dutchmen a short mile on our lea. How it may fare with me rests with Heaven. My breath is my king’s as my heart is thine. If I die, tell the king he had no truer servant. For my life, would I had——”*

But Frances had impulsively snatched away the letter.

No! No! You read his words, but not his heart. Listen, I will read it: *For my life, would I had ten thousand instead of one, to give them all to his majesty. My last thought is for him and for thee, and my last words shall be loving and loyal.* And this man loved not his sovereign?” she demanded passionately, raising her lovely, imploring eyes to the king. “But he loved me, and— Oh! it was all my fault. Punish me, if you will, but spare him. Have mercy, sire, have mercy!”

“You forget, madam, to whom you plead for your lover,” was the stern response.

“Lover! He is my husband!”

The king turned scarlet.

“Husband!” he gasped.

“We were married some weeks ago,” she went on hurriedly and brokenly. “I consented because I could not bear his doubts, his misery. Have pity upon me. It is too horrible to make a husband fall by his wife’s hand. And the

hour he dies, I shall die too. Ah, you never loved me, or you could not kill me."

In spite of himself the king was moved by her pleading. His impulses were ever kind and generous, and it was only when swayed by his own selfish desires that he showed himself harsh and unyielding.

As he stood irresolute, Lady Frances threw herself at his feet, and grasped his cloak in both her hands. With her whole soul shining in her eyes, ringing in her voice, she pleaded eagerly, desperately, madly, for her husband's life.

"Sire! sire! On my knees I implore you, by the name of Stuart, which we all three bear, by the bitter sorrows our race have suffered together, by the head of your father, the royal martyr, who, at the point of death, forgave his murderers, by your own hope of mercy from the Eternal King, have mercy upon Frances Stuart! No! I will not let you go until you grant my life! Charles! My dear cousin! Charles! Have pity on me! Pity! Pity!"

The poor, overtaxed brain gave way, the voice died away in an inarticulate moan, and, like a lily broken on its stem, Frances swayed and sank prostrate at the king's feet—white, motionless, unconscious.



With a bitter cry of "Frances! My love! My wife! My crime will be her death!" Richmond threw himself down beside her, and raised her in his arms.

At the same moment a woman with tear-stained cheeks dashed open the door of the royal closet and flew to his assistance. She chafed the cold hands and bathed the pallid brow, murmuring meanwhile words of cheer, until finally the blue-veined lids slowly unclosed and Lady Frances returned to consciousness.

"Frances, my own! Speak to me!" faltered Richmond.

With a faint smile she laid her arms about his neck, and her head sank wearily upon his breast.

The king was touched. The hard lines about his lips relaxed, and there was something wistful and pathetic in his eyes as they rested upon the husband and wife, whom it was in his power to render happy or to condemn to misery. His bitterness and jealous rage were rapidly vanishing and his own better nature was strongly asserting itself. "Poor souls!" he thought, with a mixture of pity and envy. "How they love one another! If I take his life, they will hate me."

Nell, who had been watching his face, read it

as if it had been an open book, and she whispered encouragingly to Frances :

“Be reassured, dear lady. The king relents.”

“Mistress Gwynne,” commanded the king, abruptly. “Come here.” As Nell obeyed the summons and advanced to his side, he said in a lower tone and with mock severity : “So, mistress, you have been listening, have you ?”

With an admirable assumption of injured innocence, Nell raised her eyes to his.

“I have no mean faults, your majesty,” she replied, solemnly. And then with one of those sudden changes which rendered her so charming, she made a mischievous grimace at him and whispered, confidentially : “Why, of course I have been listening, Charles. You know I have. How fond you men are of making us women tell lies.”

The king laughed and then he sighed.

“At least you must not lie to me, Nelly. Whom else have I to trust? Now, tell me, my little Mentor, what shall be the punishment of that treacherous nobleman yonder ?”

Nell laid her hand imploringly on his arm.

“You are powerful, sire. Be merciful. His fault was one of the head, rather than of the heart. There is not a nobleman in all England more loyal than his grace of Richmond.”

Charles was too keen of judgment, when not blinded by passion, not to realize that this was true.

"Then you advise me to pardon him?" he asked.

"Yes, yes, sire," replied Nell, eagerly. "You will have your reward, I know you will."

"My reward," he echoed, sadly.

"You will make two loving hearts happy, and I—I shall be happy, too."

"Heaven forbid that my merry Nell should ever be anything but happy!" he replied, half seriously, half jestingly. "I am a king, and cannot hope to have things as I wish. Well, then, since I cannot be anything more agreeable, I will be a king."

Confident and fearful at the same time, Nell watched him anxiously, as with a proud gesture he raised his hat and placed it upon his head. Then he turned and advancing toward Frances and Richmond, he addressed them with that sweet and gracious dignity which sat so becomingly upon him and which no other gentleman in the kingdom could hope to equal.

"Cousin Frances! do not tremble. You are our ward, and it is for us to see to your welfare. Cousin of Richmond, you are the husband of Frances Stuart. We are not so rich as our

brother of France ; and we can give you for our wedding present but this poor slip of paper."

As he spoke, he extended the traitorous compact. Overcome with relief and gratitude, Richmond sank upon his knees at his sovereign's feet, while Frances, her heart too full for words, seized the king's hand and pressed it rapturously to her lips.

"Oh, sire," faltered Richmond, in a voice choked with emotion, "you have conquered me, as the axe never conquered a gentleman."

"He has conquered himself," said Nell, smiling happily and proudly at Charles. "He is greater than a king "

That night his majesty announced that there had been a marriage, of which he alone had been in the secret, and he presented to the queen and the assembled court, their graces, the Duke and Duchess of Richmond. Thereafter the appearances in London of Richmond and Frances were but few. They retired to their estates in Kent, and there, far from the turmoils and intrigues of the court, they lived a peaceful, quiet life, caring only for the companionship of each other, and happy in the love that could know no satiety, no change.

In spite of Master Samuel's woeful prognos-

tications, brother John's services at the hasty marriage proved to be his stepping-stone to advancement; through the influence of the Duke of Richmond he was presented an excellent living in the country, and his faithful, modest performance of his duty finally secured for him a bishopric. As for gossipy, scandal-loving Samuel himself, his fame can never die, so long as literature exists, for his diary will ever stand unrivalled for its amusing qualities and its microscopic picture of the times.

Buckhurst was too sensible to eat his heart out for what was beyond his reach. He married fair Mistress Mary Middleton, and after being one of the most reckless, pleasure-loving bucks of the town, settled down as a model husband and father of a family.

The king dealt with the men concerned in the plot to dethrone him with rare wisdom and judgment. Some few were banished for more or less lengthy periods, but most of them were pardoned, on their oath never again to conspire against the crown, and by so acting, Charles made of those who had been his enemies some of his most devoted adherents. The Duke of Buckingham, warned in some mysterious manner of the discovery of the plot, managed to escape to France, where after living for a year or

two in anything but irksome exile, he was allowed to return and was restored to his former honors, although it is more than doubtful if the king ever bestowed upon him the same friendship which had been his in former days.

And Nelly? Dear Nelly, with the laughing eyes and roguish mouth, what shall we say of her as we bid her farewell? What, indeed, save

Be to her virtues very kind,  
Be to her faults a little blind.

And Nell's virtues far outweighed her faults. Forgive her the one error, which was more forced upon her by circumstances than indulged in by choice, and it may fairly be said she was endowed with every good quality. Flattered, courted and feted, her life sped gaily forward amidst all the merriment and dissipation of a dissolute court, but she was far different from the other ladies who were fortunate or unfortunate enough to win the royal favor, for she was as much distinguished for her personal devotion to the king as her rivals were for their wealth and titles. Brave, generous, truthful, tender and sympathetic, with a heart pitiful for all woes and a hand open to relieve all suffering, she did all the good she could and never harmed any one. The king may well have said that

she possessed an eternal sweetness and youth, for, while she devoted her life to making others happy, she still lives enshrined in the hearts of her countrymen, who cherish her memory with peculiar tenderness.

“Sweet heart, that no taint of the throne or the stage  
Could touch with unclean transformation, or alter,  
To the likeness of courtiers whose consciences falter  
At the smile or the frown, at the mirth or the rage,  
Of a master whom chance could inflame or assuage ;  
Our Lady of Laughter, invoked in no psalter,  
Adored of no faithful that cringe and that palter ;  
Peace be with thee yet from a hag-ridden age.

“Our Lady of Pity thou wast, and to thee  
All England, whose sons are the sons of the sea,  
Gives thanks, and will hear not if history snarls  
When the name of the friend of her sailors is spoken ;  
And thy lover she cannot but love—by the token  
That thy name was the last on the lips of King Charles.”

THE END.

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